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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PSYCHOTHERAPY AS HERMENEUTICS: THE CLIENT'S STORY

BY

MARGARET SELLICK

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND
RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
SPRING, 1989

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Psychotherapy as Hermeneutics: The Client's Story, submitted by Margaret Sellick in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counselling Psychology.

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Date: Jan. 30. 89

Abstract

Eight people who had been clients in psychotherapy, and who had benefitted, were engaged by the writer in loose, unstructured dialogues aimed at bringing to language between us their understanding of what had happened in their therapy which had really made a difference to them. Their stories are presented here, along with my own as interviewer, collaborator and interpreter of those stories. The co-creation which resulted from these dialogues is a hermeneutic event paradigmatic of the psychotherapy process itself in which what is brought to language between client and therapist through the unique unfolding of their dialogue together is a common world, a consensual understanding. The therapeutic encounters portrayed by these eight clients consisted of vibrant, transforming dialogues through which they were heard, respected, and cared for as persons who had the right to "name their own reality" and to participate fully as individuals in the determination of their own path of change. They were not labelled or "techniqued". Their therapists' methods were not visible as the essence of the therapy, but receded from view as through them, as through a window, these clients experienced the person of the therapist, and the consensual domain which together they generated. The implications of viewing psychotherapy as a hermeneutic event of true dialogue, of "co-naming the world", are discussed. The controversy about whether psychotherapy is best understood as a scientific technology of techniques and methods is addressed by these clients who picture psychotherapy as an "artwork" of change--that is, as both art and

work, as the unique coming together of technique and spontaneity in the creation of something new, as a dialogic event whose meaning is not to be found within the techniques and methods themselves, but in the whole collaborative event which they subserve and to which they point.

Acknowledgements

My father had a favourite quote which I first heard him recite when I was very young. It was from the great poem "Ulysses" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and it thrills me that I still remember it so clearly after all these years, and particularly now, so long after my father's death. There could be no more appropriate a quote to introduce a work such as this: "I am a part of all that I have met; Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough Gleams that untravelled world whose margin fades Forever and forever when I move." Though he and my mother are now gone, they would have delighted in the accomplishment which this dissertation represents for me, and I am indebted to them both for teaching me to ask impertinent questions of life.

There are many people whom I want to thank for their contributions to the completion of this work. I must begin with the two people who enrich my life daily with their unfailing love for me and who have made my life such a blessed journey: my husband Scott, and my beautiful daughter, Megan Joy. Scott has been my greatest and most untiring encourager, and Megan the source of my most profound joys. To my friends I must say thank you for understanding when I buried myself in the basement, and for welcoming me back when I periodically emerged. You--Sheila, Jackie, Coleen--know how much you are a part of this, for your lives, and the lives of your children, are so entwined with mine. And to you Devon, for coming into my life as teacher, and blossoming as friend, for encouraging me to take hold of what I knew, thank you.

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To the colleagues and fellow students whose work and ideas and passion for learning have really left a mark on me, I am indebted. When you read this work you will no doubt recognize the many ideas which we generated and played with together over the years.

To the members of my committee, Dr. Don Sawatszky, Dr. Jim Vargo, Sister Therese Craig, Dr. Dallas Cullen, Dr. Wilf Schmidt, Dr. Sheila McNamee and Dr. Allen Vander Well, thank you for being part of the dialogue which made this work possible, for directing my gaze through other windows and for widening my field of vision. Your amazing support and encouragment helped sustain me through every stage of this work as I struggled with words and ideas which stretched my very core. Finally, I am profoundly grateful to Dr. Allen VanderWell. Your commitment to the life of dialogue, to tolerance, and mutual respect has had a tremendous impact upon me, not just academically or professionally, but personally. Thank you for understanding the awkwardness of my pace, for celebrating with me in my discoveries, for inspiring me to work very hard, and for being my friend.

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1. Introduction to the Introduction

A. The Evolution of the Question

This dissertation is the story of my attempt to reach a fuller understanding of what happens in the process of psychotherapy which actually helps people change. Like all stories, the presence of the author is felt everywhere throughout, in the choice of characters, of questions, and in the development of the plot. It is in large part autobiographical: It is the story of my search for understanding, and I must state from the outset that what the reader will find here is not verifiable in the usual ways. I have made no attempt to distance myself from what I found, or to stand outside it and set it apart as separate, objectively verifiable "data". In a strange sense, I am the data; I am the story. I have made every attempt to illuminate the many assumptions and prejudices which I brought to this search, but not so that my reader might remove them in search of the objective kernel of truth hidden beneath. The truth, if there is any in this story, lies elsewhere, in and through the story itself, not behind or beneath it. The story is itself the truth I wish to point to. If the reader's understanding of psychotherapy is enriched by reading this story, if this stimulates dialogue, curiosity, and a renewed openness to experience, then truth will come to stand, not, as we might imagine, outside us as verifiable fact, but **between** us as we bring to light through our dialogue this, and then that aspect of our experience.

This story began, as I imagine similar ones have for many therapists, with a vague and uneasy doubt about what it is we really do when we claim to be "doing" psychotherapy, and what it is we know when we claim to "know" psychotherapy. When I completed my masters degree in clinical psychology and began practicing as a psychologist, my enthusiasm and curiosity were tempered by doubts about how well I would practice the methods I had learned. They were doubts, not about the methods, but about my competence in applying them. I cannot remember ever questionning the methods themselves, except of course in the sense of earnestly seeking the right one, and debating with colleagues the relative merits of our differing persuasions. I do remember admonishments from older, more experienced colleagues about theories and methods being no more than tools, but I really did not understand what they were trying to tell me. I had been trained in systematic doubt throughout graduate school, and I knew the importance of putting my assumptions to empirical test, of not blindly accepting this or that theory or technique without proof of its merits. I did exactly that. And, like my equally diligent colleagues, I attended workshops, studied the literature, and at times agonized over the new methods which emerged from California and which seemed to promise better results. I was flexible: I was prepared to use different theories and methods, to abandon what appeared useless, to be eclectic. I was also rigorous: I tried to tailor the methods to the client. But I did not question method itself, and it did not occur to me before I actually became a practicing therapist that, for instance, Beck's therapy for depression might really look different on me than on one of my colleagues. My goal was to allow the method to to do its work, with only so much of my own personality thrown in for seasoning as seemed appropriate to establish and maintain rapport and optimize compliance. And when I said I was doing Beck's therapy for depression, this was surely, I thought, equivalent to what my friend was doing when she was doing Beck's therapy.

It troubled me more and more that my colleagues, all in search of the truth, and I, had settled on different theories and methods in our work. Worse yet, I settled on a succession of different methods depending on what was in vogue, each time thinking that I had stumbled upon the best. And so the seeds of uneasiness began I suppose. We all learned to laugh at this diversity among us, and we soothed our differences of opinion by lipservice to our democratic right to disagree. Our world views permitted us that much at least, but certainly not to seriously believe that we could all be simultaneously right. When it occurred to us that our choices of theory and method were afterall quite consistent with our various personal styles, that we had all slipped into a method which fit us nicely, and for which we had been reinforced by occasional success, we laughed again. But each of us secretly believed that while this was most likely true of the others, our own choice was not so motivated. Afterall, someone had to be right. While it was the democratic thing to do--that is, to acknowledge differences as fundamental to freedom and progress--surely there had to be some right way, some best method for us all to strive for, or else, what were we debating about afterall? If our differences really all boiled down to differences in personal style or preference, if all of us were somehow right, what happened to the science of psychotherapy? This was something we really lacked any vocabulary for talking about. How could all of us be right?

I cannot mark precisely the beginning of the uneasiness which came over me: By the time I was really aware of myself questionning my very quest for the right method, its source was lost to me, and I don't think I could have articulated at any particular point along the way any sense of sudden unsettling, of earth-shaking revelations or disappointments, just a growing burden of uneasiness about what I was doing which helped my clients (or didn't help). I began wading through seemingly endless studies which attempted to pin down the mechanisms of therapeutic change, describing with an almost bewildering technical precision what works, when, and why, but the technology of change they portrayed left me feeling lost and alienated in my own work--alienated from myself, and from my clients. The goal of such research studies seemed to be to totally decontaminate therapeutic practice of all extraneous and interfering variables, including of course the personal characteristics of the therapist, and the effects of interpersonal influence or placebo--in order to reach the true, specific effect of the treatment method under inspection. Where did I fit in to this? Was I accidental to the process? By then I had had enough experience as a therapist to wonder why my own encounters with clients seemed so much more slippery to precise description than the encounters I read about, why in my own hands a particular method had such a different look and feel to it than when I observed my colleagues from behind the one-way mirror using the same method, why therapists, despite vastly different espoused ideologies, often appeared to do roughly the same things in a therapy session, why on the other hand, each of us behind a one-way mirror, watching the same sequence of interaction managed to see entirely different things, and why clients appeared to change in ways not even predicted by us with our theories. What were we doing? Why were so many of us unable to give any response except delighted surprise when a client improved? Why were we unable to say what it was which happened, or didn't happen, what we did or didn't do, when a client changed? Why did we so often feel a bewildering helplessness, as if the therapy somehow worked inspite of what we did?

So, what are we doing when we do psychotherapy? This is the question which nagged at me when I reentered graduate school, and when I began this dissertation. But I also wanted to ask that question in a manner which would reveal something new and surprising to me, something I had not explicitly sought. I wanted to really ask a question, not just engage in empty rhetoric with myself.

I wondered about systematically observing live sessions of psychotherapy, and trying to see something in the interaction which others might have missed, but that seemed like a sure way to generate more of the same questions and answers, and more of the same idiosyncratic musings about what constitutes a mechanism or a moment of change which already so characterizes the current muddle of debate. Doesn't everyone see something slightly different in the same behavioural sequence? Aren't we each attuned to take notice of different things, to be cued by different things in a therapy session? Each of us sees and hears what our own senses and prior constructions allow us to see and hear. Perhaps you, even unknowingly, watch for and are triggered to respond to certain kinds of therapeutic events to which I, through my own constitutional design coupled with my training, am totally unresponsive, and which for me do not exist and therefore do not constitute a therapeutic moment. Certainly I am free to make my own descriptions of what I see and hear in therapy, and like Rogers, Perls, Ellis, and dozens of others, add my own system to the growing list. What if, instead, I could ask some of my colleagues to comment on their own practice or the practice of others, and on what they thought happened in therapy which "worked"? This looked appealing, but how could I prevent this kind of dialogue from deteriorating into a game of rhetorical arguing about the relative merits of one theoretical position over another? In the end, there are too often winners and losers in such arguments, and usually it is the most fashionable position, or the one most authoritatively argued which is "right". I feared that this would only produce more of the same territorial rhetoric which it seemed to me had already so badly jammed real dialogue and real understanding of what happens in psychotherapy. Further, and even more importantly, no description which either you or I or any other therapist might provide is a description of the therapy as the client experiences and understands it. Even if we were to establish some agreement among us that a particular intervention had the form of a "cognitive-behavioural" intervention for instance, is that at all what the client actually experiences? Does the client actually receive the specific methods which we dispense? Is it the intervention itself which causes the client to change?

It occurred to me afterall that if what I wanted was the chance to really question what happens in psychotherapy which makes a difference to the people it serves, I might actually ask the people who have been helped: the clients! It is extraordinarily difficult for me to say why this came as such a revelation to me, why that is, it had not from the outset seemed the most obvious direction to take. (I do have guesses about that, which I think have to do with the burden of my training, and the tendency to devalue the opinions of those who are not so trained, ie., the client.) But once I thought of it I realized that this was exactly what I wanted: the chance to dialogue with people who had in fact experienced "successful" therapy, and to really hear something of their experience in a language which was uncluttered with technical jargon. This was the kind of understanding which I hoped would really illuminate the psychotherapy experience for me in a way which the usual outcome studies had not.

I realized with great excitement that talking to clients about their experience of therapy would allow me to ask real questions and to hear real answers about something which I truly did not know about: **their** experience. I knew, at least to some extent, and could talk about, my own experience from my side of the encounter, but I did not know their experience from the other side, except what I could imaginatively create for myself from my own experience and from my understanding of the psychotherapy literature. Here, there was something for me to learn, something which might really transform me. What **do** clients experience in this encounter?

I also knew however, that if I proceeded with this idea to talk to clients, that this opportunity to dialogue was also an invitation to **me**, not just to the clients, that the subject matter was something about which I would have many preconceived, often unarticulated ideas, and that if I was a participant in the conversations, they would unavoidably bear the mark of my own assumptions and prejudices. How could I not, by tone of voice, by nature of the questions I asked, by my mere presence in the room, shape the direction and the content of conversation? How could I possibly enter any dialogue and not simultaneously and hopelessly contaminate it? How could I remove myself from the dialogue and still have a dialogue to describe? How could I achieve anything like the kind of remote, prejudiceless, neutral objectivity which is the goal of all scientific inquiry? How could I do anything but create more muddle?

I wanted to talk to clients, and I wanted to hear, as much as possible through their own words, what they thought had made a difference in their therapy. I hoped to understand their experience, and in so doing, illuminate for myself and others what happens in this encounter which is therapeutic. But how could I possibly present the experience of these clients in some pure and objective way except through the filter of my own understanding? What methods would allow me to do this? (Again, the quest for right methods haunted me.) I realized with dismay that even the most highly structured interview format with standardized questions and a minimum of interaction and direction from the interviewer would not remove the effects of bias: It would simply introduce the bias in a different, more carefully disguised form. Even a questionnaire with tidy questions and response categories cannot be neutral. In order to ask any question--whether from a standardized question sheet or in a spontaneous dialogue--one must lay open, with one's question, a domain of possible response: One points, so to speak, to the answer, in the simple act of asking a question. It is simply impossible to do otherwise. One can perhaps pretend more easily that this is not so with a standard questionnaire, but it is a pretense; there is no question which does not reveal the universe of understanding and bias of the questionner.

So, I knew from the start that this process of understanding the client's experience was not a simple matter of letting it deposit itself in my understanding and then recapitulating it on paper as my dissertation. I realized with great frustration that understanding another's experience and articulating that understanding in a manner which would carry some validity for a reader, would outstrip my usual ways of thinking about what constitutes valid knowledge. How was I to do it then? How would I know if I really understood what the clients were telling me, and not just listening to the echoes of my own private monologue? How would my reader know? How can an interview be conducted so that the interviewer's bias, which is inescapably present, does not drown the voice of the client? How could I convey my understanding of the clients' experience in a way which would preserve the integrity of their ideas? What do we mean when we say we "understand"? What is it which is understood? Can I in fact ever claim to "understand" someone else's experience?

The evolution of the question "What do clients think has made a difference?" became the evolution of many questions, all interrelated and mutually dependent. There seemed to be no place to start into the process, and suddenly I felt trapped in an endless recursion of unanswerable questions. My initial question, so lovely in its simplicity, became a nightmare of methodological complexities. The question I wanted to ask, and the way I wanted to ask it, demanded from me some rethinking of my assumptions about the role of methods. Do we tailor our questions to fit our methods, or adapt our methods to fit our questions? Are there "right" methods which guarantee truth? As the reader will see, the dissertation which follows is in large part the story of my rethinking of certain assumptions, and my search for a method which would fit my question. It was encouraging, indeed thrilling, for me to discover that I was not the first person to deal with such issues, that the questions which I was asking had long been the impetus for an entire field of study called "hermeneutics", and that the territory which seemed so foreign to me had in fact been beautifully mapped by others.

I was right in fearing that I would never be able to present the experience of these clients as **their** experience. How could I do that--using what format? For always, even if I presented verbatim interviews with them, or even allowed them somehow to speak directly to the reader in their very own words, there is still that gap which our separate worlds of experience constitute. The reader would still not be sure what was understood--the client's own experience, or his interpretation of them as he heard their words, or some inseparable combination of the two? It is of course ontologically given to us in our nature as human beings that we cannot have another person's experience: We have our own, we are our own. We cannot escape our organic boundness to our own bodies through which our experience is generated. This is our very nature, out of which we cannot step. To try to know another's experience the way we know our own must be fundamentally wrong. But to say we understand another's experience is a statement of an entirely different sort I think, and to understand how it is that this is even possible for us clears the way for the kinds of questions which this dissertation addresses. If every act of understanding is always a fusing of preunderstandings with the unfamiliar--if, that is, our preunderstandings are the very ground and source of understanding rather than an impediment to be removed or somehow transcended--we understand then by standing firmly within our own preunderstandings, not by abandoning or rejecting them, we build upon them, incorporate them, fuse them to the present moment, into the new and unfamiliar. At every moment we carry with us our entire history of being as the very precondition and essence of continued experience. I understand another not by abandoning myself, but in and through myself. We meet; I am transformed. I convey my understanding of you not by obliterating my own experience but by awakening it, illuminating it, shining the light where your presence has transformed me. This realization became the undergirding premise of the entire story which follows.

This dissertation is really the story of my transformation as a person and as a therapist through my encounters with the clients who participated in dialogues with me. Although it is **my** answer to the question "What happens in therapy which makes a difference to the client?", rather than **the** answer, it is my hope that in the telling of this story, the process of discovery and story-making itself might also be illuminated, and that in response, others might ask similar questions and find other answers through which their practice is also transformed.

B. My Search for a Method

In the usual kind of research the method rarely becomes thematic in itself except in the details by which it is carried out. That is, the method is assumed to be some variation of the scientific method, but the scientific method is itself the unquestionned backdrop of both question and answer. It is the frame without which research does not begin. My question "what happens in therapy which makes a difference for the client?" is not a question of objective "facts" about a reality "out there" awaiting my discovery, but a question about a reality within the client, or rather **between** the client and myself as it is brought forth through our dialogue together, through the interplay of both question and answer. Question, method, and answer are inseparably entwined: The way the question itself is posed is the way it will be answered. But what kind of question is this which I am asking, and how can I answer it? What method is there which is appropriate to this question?

These are the questions which drive the whole first half of this dissertation. The arguments and reviews which follow are my attempt to work out my reasons for asking the question in the manner I have, and for looking for answers in the places I've looked.

I will try to show that the usual scientific ideal of a pure subjectivity cleansed of all bias, distanced from a world of objects upon which it operates in complete impartiality, is an ideal unsuited to the question I have asked. I hope to show that this is not the only valid knowledge which we as human beings can achieve. Further, when it is **understanding** (as opposed to knowledge) which we seek--whether it is understanding of ourselves, others, or the world which we have set apart and objectified through whatever methods--we are asking a question of an entirely different order. To understand is a further reflexive operation in which what is known is taken up with how it is known. To understand something we must bring ourselves back again and again into relation with the objects of our knowledge, and give account of the process by which we distinguished them as objects in the first place. My exploration of the "hermeneutic" winds its way through all that follows. With it I will attempt to show that our understanding of what happens in therapy is inextricably linked with the operations by which we draw it forth, that a hermeneutic of psychotherapy will enable us to trace our distinctions and in so doing really understand the creation we have brought forth. What do clients understand of psychotherapy?: That will be the question. Does that understanding say anything to us as therapists?

What happens if, instead of seeing psychotherapy as an object to be dissected into its parts and analysed, we treat it as a "work"--almost in the way we would treat a work of art which we are trying to understand? Is there something to be gained from such a perspective? Like all creations in text, in music, or on canvas, a work "speaks" to us when it is met in its wholeness and uniqueness. Its message is not to be found behind the techniques, within the brushstrokes, or in the meter: It is its own message. We who look on, or who listen or read, can marvel at the intricacy of the melody, can marvel at the delicacy of the brushwork, but it is not these which themselves delight us, but the whole which they serve, and within which they are transformed from idle marks to living beauty. It is not that the techniques lack importance: Clearly, without the order and discipline of technique, there is nothing of beauty to behold. Their relationship is one of part to whole in mutual specification: One does not exist without the other. Yet always, it is the whole which touches us, just as in language it is the phrase, not the letter, which speaks. When we speak to one another it is not our words or our grammar which we speak about: The words we use point beyond themselves to a truth or a meaning which they, in their isolation as separate words, do not constitute. In ordinary language, the words and the grammar recede from view so completely that they are themselves invisible as through them we are invited to see the world they bring forth.

Is it hard to make a case for the work of psychotherapy to be treated as "art" in the same sense in which a great painting or a symphony are works of art? Even if we take it only as an analogy, the comparison may be a useful one. As work, psychotherapy perhaps does to some extent resemble the work of artistic creation, with technique, or "method" the indispensable structure which it plays through, but from which its meaning is not derived.

Psychologists like myself are not accustomed to borrowing methodologies from other disiplines, but the questions which I am raising now about understanding and interpreting art are questions which are hardly new to historians and interpreters of art and literature. We understand any "work" through dialogue with it, by making a space for it to be present with its own voice, and by participating in the message which it brings forth. Similarly, perhaps we can understand what happens in psychotherapy when we make a space for the "art-work" to be heard. When we reduce it to principles and mechanisms we hear a basic chord, but no music. We see the tubes of paint, the canvas, and the brushstrokes, but no painting, no work. We can talk about the techniques, and in fact we can in so doing learn how to "copy" the work, but the results of our efforts will not be more "art", only a technical copy. The magic of an artwork is precisely in its uniqueness, its ability to speak of something totally new and surprising with the same twenty-six letters of the alphabet, or the same eight notes of the scale. It is not in copying the techniques, but in subserving them to a new creation that art is made possible.

In the sections which follow I want to re-state my question, set my question in a context, and show how other people have attempted to answer similar questions. I want to trace the development of an epistemology which I hope will set the foundation for this research. I hope to show that different questions can be asked, and valid knowledge gained when some of our fundamental assumptions about what constitutes real knowledge are challenged. I want to clarify how this kind of research is different from the usual scientific research, and for those who might see this difference as a threat to scientific integrity, how this story, and others like it, can be valid additions to our knowledge about psychotherapy. It is not my intent to show that this kind of research is better than, or should supplant, the more traditional kinds of outcome studies and studies of technique. It cannot, and it should not. But I would like to suggest that just as listening to a great symphony is an experience quite unlike looking at the notes on a page, or just as revelling in the beauty of a magnificent sculpture is unlike studying the qualities of granite and steel, so too understanding the work of psychotherapy is unlike the study of isolated techniques and methods. They are unlike, but they are compatible, and mutually dependent. If anything, it is the compatibility of the two which needs to be highlighted, and their common, overarching purpose, which is to fuse theory to practice, to "in-form" our actions, so that in seeing more clearly, or in seeing differently what we do, we might be enabled to do it even better.

2. Introduction

A. The Question

This is a dissertation about what happens in psychotherapy which makes a difference to the client, distilled from the experience of clients who have participated in therapy and who have been helped, and just as importantly, it is a story about my quest for a transforming understanding of their experience. This apparently simple question is I think, the same question which drives all therapeutic practice. All therapists, at least so I imagine, continuously ask themselves throughout their sessions whether what they are doing and saying is really making a difference to the client, and continuously amend their behaviour in accordance with how they answer that question until they achieve a good fit with the client. How much of this actually operates within our awareness is a good research question in itself. Much of it, I think, does not occur in full awareness at all, and when we sit back to reflect and articulate in words what has transpired our descriptions are necessarily only partial. We may sense that we have "made a difference", but our reflections upon what we think accounts for this difference are a product of our own habits of punctuation and description. I think we often take for granted that others punctuate reality as we so, that others take notice of the same things, and construe these things in similar fashion. We seem to operate as therapists as if what the client receives through the encounter is precisely that which our theories prescribe. Yet the very diversity among us in how we operate as therapists, and in how we explain our operations, and in the impact which these appear to have upon our clients, would suggest, I think, the contrary: that is, that we all notice and respond to different things, and respond to the same things quite differently. Still, in that unique back and forth movement of dialogue between ourselves and our clients, we all seek to calibrate and recalibrate our actions and words to achieve that reciprocal good fit which is the proof to us that we are making a difference. The fact that so often we cannot articulate what it is that we did or didn't do which seemed to help a particular client is a frustration which actually asking the client might help to alleviate. The question asked here, "what happens in therapy which makes a difference?", is the very same question which we all ask, and I think that the answers which follow will intrigue even though the clients who speak here are someone else's, and the interventions not the ones the reader might have chosen. What do we learn from actually asking clients about their experience? How do they explain their experience? What do they think we have said or done which really makes a difference? Perhaps our clients have something particularly important to contribute to our understanding precisely because their understandings are not so rooted in the scientific jargon of modern psychology but in their own lived experience as the other participants in therapy.

I began this study with the assumption that therapy is a shared experience between people who have come together to co-create a domain of shared meanings and value. I believe that the success of this encounter can be jeopardized by the overvaluation of the methods and language of science to the relative exclusion of the world and language which clients bring to the process, and that the whole purpose of meeting to help people in their quest for change can miscarry in the absence of real dialogue.

If therapy is understood as the dispensing of expert knowledge, and therapeutic change as something which the therapist does **to** the client, then therapist and client sit on opposite sides of the barrier of a scientific technology which makes true dialogue superfluous. If on the other hand, therapy is understood as a mutual creation, an encounter brought forth **between** people who need each other's universe of understandings, then dialogue is the very cornerstone of the process, and therapy cannot proceed without it. Further, dialogue **about** the whole process will help illuminate how clients have constructed their experience as participants. **Their** distinctions of what constitutes "the therapeutic"--of what happened which really mattered, which really made a difference to them--may help us recalibrate what we are doing as therapists.

B. The Usual Answers to Why Therapy "Works"

This one, deceptively simple question, "why therapy works", has generated many theories about why and how people change, countless "therapies", and an endless, perhaps unresolvable debate between disciples of differing therapeutic persuasions who each market their own corner on the "real truth" to the derogation of the others. The debate about which explanations and methods of change work best with which kind of client to achieve which kind of therapeutic goal is of course also a debate about radically different ontologial premises about the nature of man--most of which rarely themselves become the object of debate, and which we wrongly dismiss as irrelevant to the interests of psychologists.

Any debate over who is right is ironically only made possible when there is a more fundamental agreement between camps about the nature of this "truth" which they seek. If there is in fact one correct theoretical position, if the differences about which we argue will vanish with a perfected technology of therapeutic change, then the debate is an important step in that direction, and it makes sense to argue over who is right. The final judge will be an impartial one: Ultimately, by appeal to the objective evidence, (which as yet is bewilderingly confusing and contradictory) the issue will be decided. There is a problem with such efforts at resolution however. The problem is not in the scientific method itself, but in us, in our unquestionning acceptance of the realistic, positivistic epistemology upon which it is based, and our tendency to disguise as immutably given and unchallengeable what are in fact its value-laden and ideological assumptions. In a universe of unitary truth, achieved by appeal to objective evidence, we have ammunition for waging eternal wars over whose version of reality is the right one, and justification for preserving the status quo when it has been proclaimed as right. When we operate reflexively--that is, hermeneutically--we can begin to see what we distinguish as "true" as the product of the means by which we distinguished it, that even scientifically established fact is part of the hermeneutic circle of human understanding, and is shaped by the individual preunderstandings and assumptions, as well as the historical, political and ideological climate in which it took root.

In a universe of unitary truth it is not possible to answer the question "Why does therapy work?" without either taking up one of the current, entrenched positions, or adding to the growing list of splinter groups. In a multiverse this question is no longer divisive but simultaneously affirming of the validity of differing positions. As I will show later, clients who have participated in apparently different forms of therapy, with therapists of differing theoretical persuasions, can all experience therapy as helpful. What is it then which really does make a difference?

Research about psychotherapy outcome has not been entirely encouraging or flattering to therapists, most of whom would like to believe that what they do really does make a difference. The now-famous early studies of Eysenck (1952) which showed that psychotherapy was really no more helpful than no therapy at all (and maybe even less helpful) have always been a thorn in the flesh to therapists. The burden has been upon the researchers to demonstrate, not just to clinicians, but also to the public, and to the companies bearing the cost of psychotherapy, that psychotherapy works and that specific techniques work better than others. While it is clearer now than in Eysenck's day that psychotherapy does in fact help people (See for example, Bergin & Lambert's excellent 1978 review of not only Eysenck's data, but also the data of numerous outcome studies done since then.), what is it that therapists do which makes a difference?

The literature itself is too vast and complicated for me to properly and completely review here, but major reviews are periodically reported in the literature (Epstein, 1981; Garfield, 1983; Glass & Smith, 1976; Smith & Glass, 1977; and of course, Garfield & Bergin's entire handbook, 1978). Still, after years of patient and careful study, there seem to be few definitive answers, and the same questions, "does psychotherapy work?", how, why, and by whose criteria?, smoulder beneath the fire of conflicting data. There are data to support almost any imaginable hypothesis, and research on a growing list of variables--all in the attempt to finally pin down the mechanism(s) of change. Client characteristics (see Garfield's review, 1978), as well as therapist characteristics (see Parloff et al, 1978), and "relationship" characteristics or "therapeutic alliance" variables (eg., Frieswyk et al, 1986;

Patterson, 1984) have all been researched and demonstrated to be important to the therapeutic outcome. But the hottest of all the debates seems to be centred around the issue of whether there are in fact specific effects for specific therapies, and whether therapeutic change can be attributed to these effects. Researchers face the almost incomprehensible task of showing which variable(s) under which conditions produce which kinds of change with which kind of problem (Strupp, 1978). The traditional outcome studies comparing one kind of treatment to another across supposedly homogenous groups, with built-in controls for all of the supposedly contaminating "non-specific" effects, have aimed at isolating the supposed specific effects of a particular therapy and distilling them into a purified therapeutic intervention which can be dispensed somehow identically by all therapists. The therapist herself becomes an almost superfluous component in this kind of study, or at least, and interchangeable unit operating as the conveyor of the method. Further, although the component of change which we call placebo, and all of the interpersonal processes which combine to accentuate expectancy and build hope between client and therapist, have been acknowledged as elements which indeed participate in the process of change, they continue to be seen as confounding influences which need to be ruled out before we can hope to achieve understanding of the "real", specific effects of the therapy. The thinking has been that the real determinants of change will finally be isolated once these other, troublesome effects have been removed--that while these non-specific effects, as they have been called, may certainly be helpful in maintaining the alliance and enhancing compliance, the "real" therapeutic mechanism lies elsewhere, in the treatment method itself. The controversy over this issue is nowhere near resolution, with researchers lined up on both sides, some devoted to continuing the traditional outcome study comparing the effectiveness of different treatments, and others striving to demonstrate the common factors and the common pathway of change underlying all therapeutic systems. Those who have chosen to continue the search for specific effects must contend with enormous methodological difficulties such as differences in style between therapists, differences in the way the "same" kind of intervention is delivered, differences in the strength and quality of the relationship between therapist and client, diffferences in the expectations of the client and willingness to comply, all of which contaminate the precision with which any conclusions about specific variables can be made. The result has been a literature which grows frantically but without integration. There is little agreement about what actually constitutes the phenomenon we call therapeutic change, much less how it should be measured. "The phenomena of therapy are like those in physics", writes Greenberg (1986, p. 712), "in that they are extremely complex and interactive, with layer upon layer of structure". Still, inspite of valiant efforts, the traditional outcome study has failed to show any clear superiority of one therapeutic system over another. Basically it seems, any kind of treatment works as well as any other. This puzzling difficulty in demonstrating the effectiveness of certain techniques, and the differential effectiveness of some techniques for certain problems, has been dealt with in the literature in different ways. From some there has been mounting pressure for revisions in the traditional outcome study design, for more innovative research designs which take the unique individual case as the starting point and which show how a specific kind of therapeutic intervention helped in that particular case, for a more microscopic focus with better specified units of analysis and greater attention to the contextual variables which allow therapeutic interventions to be tailor-made for each client (eg., Barlow, 1981; Budge, 1983; Greenspan & Sharfstein, 1981; Hayes, 1981; Kazdin, 1981; Stiles et al, 1986). Others, like Luborsky et al (1986), contend that variations in success rates in therapy may have more to do with the therapist than with the type of treatment used, and they suggest that what is needed is a more thoughtful study of successful therapists (rather than specific therapies).

While some researchers continue the search for increasingly refined and specific accounts of change mechanisms, others argue that client changes are the result of factors which cut across and are common to all therapies and orientations, such as Rogers' (1957) famous "necessary and sufficient facilitative conditions", (see for example, Kazdin's review of "nonspecific" treatment factors, 1979), and that outcome is unrelated to the specific techniques used or even to the level of experience of the therapist (Hynan, 1981; Stein & Lambert, 1984). Strupp (1985, 1986), Frank (1981, 1985), and others (eg., Karasu, 1985, 1986; Lazarus, 1980; Luborsky, 1985; Marmor, 1985; Michels, 1985; Parloff, 1986; Telch, 1981), have debated these issues without closure, and the questions still remain: Do specific psychotherapies deliver specific effects, and is change the result of those effects, or do all psychotherapies operate inspite of their claims through more or less equivalent mechanisms which they all share, such as instilling self-efficacy and hope (Lazarus, 1980), interpersonal persuasion (Frank, 1973), combatting demoralization (Strupp, 1985), and placebo effects (Shapiro, 1960, 1964; Shapiro & Morris, 1978; Wilkins, 1984).

Perhaps afterall the questions themselves are wrong. Perhaps we should not be asking "what is psychotherapy", and "what causes psychotherapeutic change"--as if these questions could be answered by appealing to the real world "out there" for the objective evidence. Perhaps everyone is right, and therapy is all these things, and more.

When a particular client and a particular therapist come together, in their talking they bring forth a world-- at first to some extent, two worlds, but increasingly as the words begin to resonate with mutual meaning, a common world. The client brings forth her distinction of her reasons for being there, the therapist hers. If they really succeed in meeting, in establishing dialogue, they move towards that common language where each feels understood. If psychotherapy is that common world generated through dialogue which these two unique persons in this unique encounter have brought forth, then the question "what is psychotherapy?" can be answered by showing by what distinctions they have brought it forth in their unique coming together, and they can be any which have fit for them. Perhaps the answer is to be found within us, in our own distinctions, not in the world "out there".

To return to my initial question "what happens in psychotherapy which makes a difference to the client?", what I am hoping to show as this dissertation unfolds, is how certain clients construct their experience and in constructing it understand it. We too, as therapists, by bringing to awareness, and to dialogue, those distinctions through which we operate as therapists and which determine for us what constitutes a therapeutic moment and a therapeutic intervention, can show how we construct our own experience, and in constructing it, understand it. When we understand how our clients construct their experience, and how what we do makes a difference to them, we may be in a better position to calibrate our own behaviour towards a better "fit".

First, I turn to the building the frame through which I hope the enterprise of psychotherapy will be seen with new clarity. My intent is not to dispense with other frames, but simply to suggest that all frames are subject to the same limitation. That is, to the extent that any frame gives only one perspective, they all depict a static human image, and they can bequeath to psychotherapy a misunderstanding of the nature of this human encounter. When we operate as therapists through any rigid frame we are inclined t operate as authorities dispensing the truth, and we take it upon ourselves to change others in accordance with the image of the human which we have inherited through our own perspective. These images which guide us are powerful and potentially dangerous to the extent that they distort the way we come together as client and therapist, and limit what can be said between us. If human nature is not something to be determined by appealing to the facts, if it is human nature to be continuously self-defining in language, if it is impossible to say "it is this" or "it is that", if it is outrageously dynamic and constantly on the road to becoming--through which frame will we see the image which will guide us in psychotherapy? Where is it to be found? In the following I hope to trace the development of the frame through which I see psychotherapy.

3. Building The Frame

A. Psychological Images of Humankind

It is easy, having grown up in a scientific age, and being accustomed as we are to the ontological and epistemological assumptions which we so dutifully accepted throughout school, to assume with innocent faith that the scientific view of things is the only view compatible with reason--that our understanding of ourselves will grow as the knowledge of objective facts about us grows. Comte's positivism, which fundamentally trivialized all knowledge except that which was derived through the scientific method, has had a particularly unfortunate, dehumanizing result in the human sciences where the humankind of objective, pure, scientific scrutiny has begun to look less and less like ourselves. It is now the scientific authorities rather than religious leaders who determine our definitions of reality and of our humanity, and metaphysical questions--questions which reveal humankind's need for meaning and understanding of what has been set apart and objectified--have been relegated to the status of vague, irrelevant yearnings for something less than the "facts". We have now a scientific psychology to bear our collective myths and images, to tell us the truth about ourselves, and we are in danger of losing the very process by which we distinguish ourselves as human "We have a dehumanizing psychology in a dehumanized society", writes Heather (1976, p. 55). "T. S. Eliot was right: We are the hollow men, and we have a hollow psychology to prove it." Echoes Wittgenstein, "Psychology has experimental methods and conceptual confusion" (1953).

Psychology, in its drive for scientific status, adopted the scientific method as its hope for true progress in the study and understanding of humankind. True knowledge seemed guaranteed if only we could give up idle religious and philosophical speculation, and look to the "facts". This whole notion that there are such things as objective "facts" which can be gathered pure and unviolated by an external, impartial observer cleansed of all bias, that such facts constitute the raw stuff of knowledge, and that the discovery and accumulation of those facts will amount to understanding, has been the foundation of Western Science and much of modern psychology. It is based upon a conviction--itself largely unchallenged--that knowledge is "true" when it represents the world as it exists "out there" independently of our own experience, independently of the operations by which we captured it, and that we can know that world objectively, in some disembodied sort of way as it really is--not just as it appears to be to us. (see Watzlawick's The Invented Reality, 1984, for an excellent review of this notion.) On this conviction rests another assumption: that the test of an idea's validity is the extent to which it truly represents the world as it is. What this conviction presupposes is a picture of the scientific observer as a pure subjectivity upon which the world as it really is can be encoded or simply deposited through some act of pure, impartial perception. Proper methods--scientific methods--supposedly decontaminate the field of observer bias, and guaranteee the purity of perception. The world "as it really is" finally yields to us, and we have objective knowledge of it, and of ourselves.

The problem with the scientific method is not what it achieves--which is unarguably great--but that we, in our operations through it, have tended to forget the very operations, or methods through which our "facts" were generated in the first place, and have tended to disguise as immutably true, neutral, and value-free those "facts" which are the product of our (often vested) interests. The "real" world which we take as the standard by which our facts are to be validated, is the same world which we have generated through the empirical method. This tautological validation is then taken as proof of the facticity or "reality" of what we generated, and the outcome of this is an ideology which defines what can be accepted as true and limits our freedom to recreate this reality in other ways.

The data about human nature which we have gathered by this method have become the foundation for new definitions of ourselves, and now shape our images of who we are, and what we may become. Our history is more than a history of biological evolution. We are coupled not only to a biological niche, but also to a cultural niche--a world we have created, and are creating, through language, in dialogue, and in community with others. We both shape, and are shaped by, the world of our creation which we transmit through language to the generations which follow us. The images by which we portray our humanity--whether in science, or in art--define and may constrain who we are, and who we might become. "We are what we pretend to be", wrote Kurt Vonneghut Jr. (1968), so "we must be careful what we pretend to be".

Our attempt to understand ourselves has been guided by the same desire to predict and control which has characterized our many other scientific achievements. But it is here, far more than in the physical sciences, that the belief that empirical validation of a theory specifies how things "really are" is potentially the most troublesome. Such validation is all too easily translateable into static prescriptions of how we should and must be. In psychotherapy, where our intent is most obviously the achievement of influence and change, the images by which we are guided are indeed powerful. This is all the more so when those images have been closed to dialogue by persons or by a culture with the authority to decide for others what constitutes the ultimate truth.

When this happens--when some people have the authority to "name the world" (Freire, 1986) on behalf of others--the "ontological vocation of man" to become more fully human, to name the world in dialogue with others and in naming it to transform it, has been oppressed. This idea of naming the world is the key to Freire's pedagogy. We do not exist in a static world which is fully given "in itself" and to which we are organically bound, as animals are. We do not simply adapt to the world; We emerge from it, objectify it, locate ourselves outside it, and transform it. We live in the world we ourselves have created in community with others. This right to "name the world"--to decide what constitutes reality for us--is not a task to be carried out by some on behalf of others, but in mutual trust, in dialogue which leads to an "ever closer partnership in the naming of the world". When some people claim the right to name the world for others they rob those others of their ontological status as subjects, the life of dialogue ceases, and the "culture of silence"--of "monologue"--begins. This is as true in the practice of psychotherapy as in the pedagogy of oppressed people.

With positivistic psychology we have done precisely that: We have all too often attempted to name the world, and others. To the extent that our practice of psychotherapy is rooted within this tradition, we are in danger of oppressing, through our own methods, the very people we attempt to help. The extent to which this naming is then presented as the one ultimate truth--the correct picture of the world the way it is "in itself", or of human nature--it does violence to the life of dialogue, and to our vocation as human beings. We cannot escape our vocation to name the world and ourselves. "One has to substantiate one's humanity at every instant", writes Von Foerster (1985). It is our nature to name, to make distinctions in language, to bring a world forth (Maturana, 1985). We cannot step outside our distinctions: Every step is another distinction. But we can reflect, hermeneutically, upon those steps. Each step can be a frame, not a trap--a frame through which one perspective is seen, through which we can look together, and out of which we can step at any moment if another view intrigues us, or another voice calls us to dialogue.

B. Towards a New Image

"Men have created and are still creating the characteristics of their own humanity." (Shotter, 1975, p. 13) What is it which distinguishes us as human? This is not a simple question because, as we have seen, any attempt to say what our nature is can all too easily become prescriptive and oppressive. My purpose here is not to supplant any of the current images with my own, but to suggest that what characterizes us as human is not captured by any one of these images exclusively, but by the very process through which we generate these images in the first place. We are creatures whose nature is not given as a matter of objective fact: In some manner we create, and continuously recreate that nature. But how?

Before the great scientific revolution of the 1600's our uniqueness in the animal kingdom was attributed to a spiritual presence which connected us with God. We fell from the pinnacle of creation under the impact of a series of blows which also removed Earth from the centre of the universe. There was no longer a Grand Designer in whose image we were created. In His place were the workings of an impersonal machine, blindly proceeding according to deterministic laws which governed everything dowm to the most infintessimal particle of matter. Everything could be explained in terms of the forces operating upon particles of matter. With a psychology rooted in this tradition we have studied ourselves too as a submechanism of nature. We have explained our own behaviour in terms of the workings of neural mechanisms which in turn we have explained in terms of electrical discharges, which in turn we have explained in terms of atomic particles, which in turn can be explained according to the subatomic, and so on. Our psychology ultimately gets swallowed up in physics.

To ask "what is humankind" in that context is a non-question. But that is precisely the way we often ask the question, and it can hardly be surprising then that we fail to find anything resembling ourselves. To ask the question in that way is to ask a question in the domain of physics--a domain psychology is proud of emulating, even though physics long ago abandoned the methods psychology still clings to--and to invite an answer in the domain of physics. Is this the appropriate domain?

If we ask the question "what is humankind" in a way which also asks that we give account of the process by which we asked the question--that is, "what is humankind that we are able to even ask such a question?"--we are asking a question of an entirely different order, and we are now in the domain of hermeneutics. This is a lovely example of the self-reflexivity which Varela (1984) and others have called for, and what Von Foerster refers to as an "eigen" question (1985). We can now give some account of our nature which takes as its starting point the fact that we exist in language as self-reflexive beings, that we ask questions, conduct science, and so on. We can now hope to give an account of ourselves which does not bury us beyond recognition beneath objective data.

Now the question "what is humankind?" is a question which specifies its own domain. We are beings who seek to define ourselves, who distinguish ourselves as beings who make distinctions and in making distinctions are human. How do we do this?

When we seek to know ourselves as objects, the thinking, searching, theorizing "self" continuously eludes the search; It is always outside the ever-expanding circle of characterizations which it generates. Each and every characterization, every new image, changes both observer and observed, catches them in an ever-cycling loop of mutually specified changes. Perhaps our nature is not an empirical thing to be known like other objects by its observable properties; perhaps it is immanent in the search itself, and in our interactions with others who share the search, in a shared history created together in language, in the dance of mutual changes, and the constantly shifting images. I don't mean to suggest that we are wrong in studying ourselves as objects: It is our nature to set apart and objectify that which we seek to know. But we must, I think, also bring ourselves back into relation, we must complete the circle of understanding and remind ourselves that what we know is the product of how we brought it forth.

Our humanity is to some extent then given to us in the language we learn, in the universe of distinctions which evolve through generations of people. Psychology has I think blurred this distinction; Its vocabulary, now well-popularized, promotes the idea that what distinguishes us as human resides somewhere peculiarly hard to locate within the mind, where the notion of mind is a psychologized one. If instead, we take the more surprising view that mind is not confined within the psyches of individuals, but immanent **between** people, in the operations of language, we suddenly have the possibility of a new understanding of our elusive humanity. The domain in which we exist as "human" is the domain we call forth in community with others through dialogue. It is the domain which Buber has called the "interhuman".

Martin Buber's philosophical anthropology (see for example, The Knowledge of Man, 1965) is an attempt to come to terms with the problem of "man as man". For Buber, like Freire, dialogue is not just the verbal expression of an individual self seeking disclosure; it is the ontological reality upon which the self first comes into being, and through which it is sustained and authenticated. For Buber the nature of "man as man" is not to be found either in the individual, nor in the collective. Friedman, Buber's translator, describes:

> "Man is neither a gorilla nor a termite. He is a creature of the "between", of the happening between man and man that cannot be reduced to a sum of two individuals or to a merely psychological reality within the minds of each." (Between Man and Man, 1965, p. xx)

For Buber, the "fundamental fact of human existence is man with man." (Between Man and Man, p. 203) It is here, in the ontological reality which he calls "the between", that we are constituted as fully human beings.

> "On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge, where I and Thou meet, there is the realm of the "between". (Between Man and Man, p. 204)

"The between" is not a pretty metaphor for Buber. It is the "real place and bearer" of our meeting, the real place where in dialogue we are distinguished as different than the animals. It is "the primal category of human reality" where we are made human. There, where we reach out beyond our own world and turn towards the Thou, that sphere which is common to both, but which belongs to neither, is born.

It is through love--through that which binds us together--that this is possible. Maturana speaks of the "mutual stickiness" which brings us forever into dialogue, into that domain of interaction where our human nature is born.

So, we are beings in language in nature, or beings in culture in nature (Shotter, 1975). It is there, in the between, on that "narrow ridge", not in the psyche, or the neurons, or the particles of physics, that we find ourselves. This is the realm of the "hermeneutical" where we come together with our preunderstandings, which are us, to greet each other in our differences and evolve towards new understanding of ourselves.

C. Towards an Epistemology of Living Systems

To some extent, unavoidably, this section comes frustratingly late. I have already been using terms and concepts which anticipate this next part of the story, and which I have borrowed from the authors to whom I now turn. In this next section I hope to trace the development through people like Gregory Bateson, Humberto Maturana, and Heinz Von Foerster, of the epistemology upon which this story has been built. By setting this wider context, I hope to illuminate a way of thinking which cuts across many different disciplines. I hope to draw what I think are the important implications of a constructivist understanding of living systems, and then to show how these have guided the present research. I think that when we operate as researchers (and as therapists) from a constructivist standpoint, we operate, as Maturana has put it, with "objectivity in parentheses" (Efran & Lukens, 1985, p. 24): We accept that there is no knowledge, and no understanding which is free of the observer who generates it, and we operate hermeneutically in the realization that it is only through ourselves (and through the preunderstandings, prejudices, and assumptions which "are" us) that understanding is even made possible. Further, this is as true of the traditional scientific research, with its rigorous and "objectifying" methods, as it is of the present research.

Traditionally, scientific discourse has been thought to be discourse **about the observed** as a phenomenon **separate from** the observer. The whole point of scientific investigation, at least so we thought, was to wrestle ourselves out of the picture. The idea that we belong in the picture, that in some sense we **are** the picture, was self-referential and paradoxical nonsense, and totally in contradiction to our whole aim in the first place. Von Foerster (1971) speaks:

> "Self-reference in scientific discourse was always thought to be illegitimate, for it was generally believed that The Scientific Method rests on 'objective' statements that are supposedly observer-independent, as if it were impossible to cope scientifically with self-reference, self-description, and self-explanation--that is, closed logical systems that include the referee in the reference, the observer in the description and the axioms in the explanation.
>
> This belief is unfounded, as has been shown

> by John von Neumann, Gotthard Gunther, Lars Lofgren and many others...who answered this question successfully. (p. 239-240)

This idea of scientific observations being self-referential requires a transformation in our basic assumptions about how knowledge, and truth, are constituted. This is not easy. Whitehead and Russell's famous theory of Logical Types (1901) for example, was an attempt to outlaw self-reference in logic and mathematics because self-referential statements produced paradox within the traditional systems of logic. What began as a "fly in the ointment", an annoyance for which traditional logical systems had no use, and for which banishment was the only answer, has however, become the very essence--the key--to understanding the operation of living systems and "mind". The "paradox" was only paradoxical because it was inconsistent with the logical assumptions which excluded it (see Dell, 1986). In physics, the shift away from excluding self-reference came with the realization that observations are always relative to an observer's point of view, and that the observer loses irretrievably any hope of complete prediction because the act of observation not only determines what is observed but also what cannot be observed, that we change the phenomenon by observing it (Heisenberg, 1958). Entire books have been written to popularize the new physics (eg. Gary Zukav's The Dancing Wu Li Masters, 1979), and any attempt I make here will be hopelessly bare. Still, for me the important insights have to do with the realization that it is as much we who mold reality, as the other way around. "Who are the dancers and who the dance? They have no attributes other than the dance." (Zukav, 1979, p. 332) Varela echoes: "...(W)e stand in relation to the world as in a mirror that does not tell us how the world is: neither does it tell us how it is not." (1984, p. 332) We look "out" upon the world and discover our own eyes looking back upon us, and find subject and object inseparably entwined. Schrodinger (1958), the Nobel Prize winner, wrote:

> "The reason why our sentient, percipient and thinking ego is met nowhere within our scientific world picture can easily be indicated in seven words: because it is itself that world picture." (p. 52)

Similarly, Varela (in Watzlawick, 1984, p. 331) writes: "In contrast with what is commonly assumed, a description, when carefully inspected, reveals the properties of the observer. We, observers, distinguish ourselves precisely by distinguishing what we are not, the world." It was G. Spencer-Brown (1973) who introduced, in Laws of Form, a calculus based upon the concept of an inside and an outside arising at the moment when we make a distinction: "... a universe comes into being when a space is severed or taken apart". (p. v) By drawing distinctions (or making computations upon computations), we construct a world which is both "us", and "not us". A universe comes into being through the act of making a distinction.

If, in addition to this notion of the circularity and reflexivity of subject and object, we also add the insight that "mind" or mental process has formal properties which can be described independently of its particular embodiments--that is, that it is a pattern of organization of the material components, rather than the material components or structure themselves, which characterizes living and mental process--we find ourselves in the territory of "cybernetics". Keeney (1983) credits Weiner (1948) with coining the term "cybernetics" to name the new kind of thinking which he and his colleagues (McCulloch, Von Neumann, Rosenblueth, Bigelow, Pitts, Bateson, Mead, Lewin, Northrop, Von Foerster, as well as others), had been exploring. In an attempt to set out the general principles which any system would have to embody in order to exhibit the concept we call "purpose", for instance, they came upon the insight that the laws governing "mind" were not to be found among the laws governing energy or matter, but among the laws governing "information". This was the birth of the idea of "feedback"--an idea which was to revolutionize scientific inquiry in the decades which followed.

Just why was this concept of "feedback", which is so familiar to us now, such a revolutionary insight? In the cybernetic universe of feedback loops, of systems learning, changing and so maintaining their adaptation by closing round upon themselves to return information, or news of a difference, it became unnecessary in describing this activity to make any reference to a world of material objects or physical forces. The cybernetic universe was an unmeasurable one, of patterns and organization which spanned across all the branches of science and which was not tied to any particular materialization of its principles. The idea of "feedback" gave us the possibility of describing how systems change in order to stay the same--that is, in order to maintain their adaptation, learn, and grow. Another basic idea was that mental process could be observed in all manner of living systems, wherever information travelled a feedback circuit. Further, "information" was not something located either "inside" or "outside" the system, either in the "subject" or in the "object", but was the name of the process itself which informed the system of "news of a difference". The subject/object split became an irrelevant fiction: "Mind" then was not to be located within the skin of an organism. The world "outside" the organism could not be conceptualized in terms of deposits of information "in the mind", or iconic representations.

In a system sustained by feedback, learning is "error activated" (Bateson, 1972, p. 381) and brought about by difference, not by "deposits" which somehow encode themselves and resemble the real world "out there". Perhaps one of Von Foerster's examples (1984) can help clarify this: Light-receptor cells in the human retina absorb electromagnetic radiation which can lead to the discharge of other cells in the post-retinal network, but what is transmitted is not information about the actual source of the stimulus, only the intensity of the radiation absorbed. Von Foerster states further:

> "The same is true for any other sensory receptor, may it be the taste buds, the touch receptors, and all the other receptors that are associated with the sensations of smell, heat and cold, sound, and so on: They are all 'blind' as to the quality of their stimulation, responsive only as to their quantity."
> (1984, p. 46)

"Outside" us there is no colour or taste or texture or sound, only clouds of atomic particles (or energies, or whatever). The rest--the world in all its concreteness--we have generated through countless computations and computations of computations on that outrageously simple "news of a difference" which activates the neural network.

It was Gregory Bateson (1972, 1979) whose works brought many of these ideas to my attention. He was a prophetic thinker and writer who argued against the domination of subject over object and a scientific technology of prediction and control: He saw it as a vulgar and misguided attempt to advance man's power over nature, and insisted that such a technology, however appealing in the short run, would ultimately destroy the interconnected ecology of living systems. He even feared for the survival of man. He feared that our setting of ourselves over against nature to subdue and exploit without regard for the recursiveness of the interknit planetary ecology would disrupt the balance upon which our survival depends, and would be our ultimate doom.

It is not only Bateson's vision as an biologist which I want to highlight here, but also his revolutionary vision as a cybernetician. He pressed for a radical shift in our assumptions about the nature and function of knowledge, and the nature of living systems (which we are). For Bateson, knowledge was not an iconic representation of the world "out there", but a "map" constituted by transforms of "differences which make a difference". For Bateson then, to be living and to know were inseparably entwined: biology and mind were linked. It is our biology which selects which differences will make a difference, and so determines what will become information for us; our "ideas" are answers to questions which lie immanent in our own biology. For Bateson, "mind" was not "limited by the skin", but was to be found wherever transforms or news of a difference travelled a circuit, wherever systems learned as a result. The entire universe was itself a mind-like unity constituted by living systems which, through the recursiveness of their organization were able to learn, and which through their interactions in the larger planetary ecology which they consituted and integrated, participated in the evolutionary cybernetic process he called "Mind".

There has been a tremendous interest in recent years in the work of the Chilean scientist Humberto Maturana, whose provocative early study of colour vision in the frog (see Maturana, 1980) has, strangely enough, led to many applications in the family therapy field. (see for example, Colapinto, 1985; Dell, 1985; Efran & Lukens, 1985; Simon, 1985.) The implications of his work are not as obscure as one might imagine: They provide the necessary ontological foundation to many of Bateson's ideas (Dell, 1985).

Maturana's laboratory work convinced him that colour vision could only be understood as the product of neurophysiological correlations internal to the organism, not as the result of correlations between external stimuli and the neurological apparatus. While this might seem like a rather obscure finding to report here, it is actually the pivotal insight of a brilliant contribution to the epistemology of living systems. Maturana's work has shown that the nervous system is a **closed** system, that it does not receive information or inputs from the outside (as traditional information theory would suggest), and that all its activity is activity determined solely by its own (changing) structure. The idea is simple but its implications far-reaching. It provides an ontological confirmation of the cybernetic epistemology of Bateson (Dell, 1985), and demands radical changes in the classical, positivistic epistemology which has guided the biological and social sciences. It is these implications which I now want to draw out in some detail.

In Maturana's universe, living systems are not, and cannot be, informed from the outside. Sensory surfaces are not open surfaces which collect information--like deposits--which the organism then assimilates to its own uses. They are part of the closure of the nervous system which they integrate. The nervous system never at any point computes data from the external world; What it computes are changes in its own structure, and changes of changes, and changes of changes of changes, and so on. It is always only its own structure which enters its computations as it operates recursively on its own operations. (Recall Von Foerster's examples of sensory pathways.) All living systems are inherently, always, structure-determined--that is, it is the structure of the system which determines how it can be perturbed, the path of change it can take as the result of perturbation through interaction, and the kinds of interactions it can sustain in its medium.

Maturana also wrestled with what it is which makes a living system living--what it is in other words which characterizes or specifies life. The answer he proposed was :

> "It is the circularity of its organization that
> makes a living system a unit of interactions, and
> it is this circularity which it must maintain in
> order to remain a living system."
> (Maturana, 1970, p. 9)

A living system is constituted by relations of components which through their interactions generate the same system which generates them as components. Living systems are self-producing, or "autopoeitic". (Maturana, 1980) They close upon themselves in a perpetual circularity as autonomous systems with a history determined from within, and contingent to, their own changing structures. Varela (1984), Maturana's colleague and compatriot, describes it this way:

> "This configuration is the key: **closure** of operations whereby products are in the same levels as productions. In fact, within this organization, the usual distinctions between producer and product, beginning and end, or input and output, cease making sense....Once such autonomous unities are established, a whole new **domain** is generated: life as we know it today. Indeed, on this basic theme of tangled loops of molecular productions, many variations can be played, many different specific configurations, and thus a host of different cells." (p. 312)

For Maturana, "living, as a process, is a process of cognition" (1970, p. 7). To "know" is to live: Any living system has a way of knowing specified by its structure, and every system is a way of knowing. (Dell, 1985) Like Bateson's "Mind", which was the total mental process of the whole, living creatura, cognition (knowing) becomes for Maturana synonymous with living, and mind becomes an immanent feature of the world of structure-determined systems. To behave in coordination with one's medium--to successfully continue in one's course of autopoeisis--is to behave "intelligently". Knowledge then, is successful living, and reveals the way we live together. Knowledge is never knowledge **about** something; it is a manner of being (Simon, 1985).

Structure-determined systems can and do interact: Their autonomy and closure does not in any way prohibit this. However, they do not interact in the sense that the behaviour of one can cause or determine the behaviour of the other: Each is on a path of structural change contingent to its own structure. "Instructive interaction"--where one system causes another to change--would be an ontological impossibility. Systems do however "couple" together, each as the medium of the other, such that over time their individual paths of change become mutually interlocked. Complex, structurally plastic systems (like human beings) have an inherent tendency to become automatically and richly interlocked over time, co-generating in the process of their mutual perturbation, a closed pattern of interactions which becomes stabilized as coordinated patterns of behaviour. Coordinated behaviour is like an "eigen state" (Von Foerster, 1985), evolving into stabilized patterns through recursive operations in a sustained coupling. Or, "As in the illustration of the fractal, behaviour is like the mythical ancestor of this infinitely recurring process, looping on itself repeatedly." (Varela, 1984, p. 320)

Coordinated conduct generates a common domain of interaction. Language arises when the participants in this coupling observe the coupling and simultaneously observe their own observing--a further recursive, and wonderfully creative "loop". Thus it is in language that we become an object to ourselves--that we can observe ourselves as others do, becoming in other words, self-aware. And it is in language that a "world" is brought forth and "objects" in that world. Language at once generates an observer who is acting both in the domain of coordinated conduct and outside it observing himself. In language, the world of interlocked, inseparable recursions becomes a world of objects, and isolated things (Like Buber's relation of I-It.). It is action which comes first, which is primary in the generation of "knowing". Man acts upon the world, and through his recursive operation upon his own operations--in other words, through the self-referentiality of his operations as a closed, autonomous system--there evolve stable interactions which he then "names". The names operate in language as if they denote an object "out there", but really they correspond to the history of recursive operations which generated them. The object "rattle", for instance, comes to exist when the infant's recurrent interaction with it generates a stabilized sensorimotor pattern of "rattle behaviours" which it calls "rattle".

The distinctions which arise in language are those which are made possible by the structure of the observer. They are not just any distinctions; They are constrained by the nature of the coupling in the medium, and they are generated in a domain of coordinated conduct--a social domain shared with other observers. All knowledge is therefore "observer-dependent".

The world is given to us in language. The distinctions made in language determine what belongs in the world, what constitutes reality. We cannot escape our distinctions to gain access to some higher truth. We are forever always already in language, which is a closed system. When we theorize about language, and about ourselves as languaging creatures, we are already in language. Varela explains further:

> "There is no world except that experienced through those processes given to us and which make us what we are. We find ourselves in a cognitive domain and we cannot leap out of it or choose its beginnings or modes.....whenever we do try and find the source of, say, a perception or an idea we find ourselves in an ever-receding fractal, and wherever we choose to delve we find it equally full of details and interdependencies. It is

> always the perception of a perception of a perception....Or the description of a description of a description....There is nowhere we can drop anchor and say, "This is where this perception started; this is how it was done." (1985, p. 320)

No organism can escape the fact that its knowledge is the result of its own history of interactions. There is then no such thing as knowledge which transcends the experience of the knower. There is no direct access to an absolute reality independent of us. All knowledge reveals the knower. All observations are made by an observer who brings forth the observed. We must, warns Maturana (1985), keep "objectivity" in parentheses. Is this an argument which resurrects the ancient voice of solipsism? No. Von Foerster replies:

> "If....I am the centre of the universe, my reality is my dreams and my nightmares, my language is monologue, and my logic is monologic. If I adopt it, neither I nor the other can be the centre of the universe. As in a heliocentric system, there must be a third that is the central reference. It is the relation between Thou and I, and this relation is identity:
>
> reality = community" (1985, p. 60)

D. Towards a Hermeneutic of Science

We are languaging beings whose very nature catches us in puzzling loops: We find ourselves already in language, trying to explain the fact that we have language at all, we operate within a cognitive domain from which we try to explain the fact of our own cognition, and we find ourselves simultaneously in the world we set apart and outside as the one setting apart. There is no method--not even scientific method--which can extract us from these "tangled loops" (Varela, 1984). We oscillate forever between "setting apart", and coming into relation, between "I-It" and "I-Thou" (Buber, 1958). It is in fact this oscillation, this "dance", which is so essential to the life of dialogue, and to the progress of knowledge. To exist in a continuous "I-Thou" of uninterrupted relation would be a monotone of unentangled oblivion and sterile silence. The setting apart, the naming of the world, the making of a distinction--this is the necessary first step in the life of dialogue. But the retracing of our steps to illuminate the distinctions themselves--rather than just the "objects" which stand apart as the result of our distinctions--is equally necessary to complete the hermeneutic circle. Dialogue also ceases when we lose track of our distinctions, when we become enamored with only one right view, one right frame. It is the continued openness to experience, to other frames, and to other views, which is the essence of true dialogue with life.

If we accept the foregoing we face several radical changes in our usual ways of thinking about the world and about what constitutes knowledge of that world. The changes will not be easy, but if Bateson was right, our survival depends upon them.

Structure-determinism demands a shift away from thinking of the universe as causally determined by forces and impacts (the familiar Newtonian universe of linear cause and effect) where A **causes** B to happen, where I can **make** you do something, where scientists unilaterally control some isolated segment of the ecosystem. There can be no "instructive interaction" in a structure-determined world: Objects, animals, and people behave exclusively as their structures dictate, and are not changed from the outside by anything done to them. An organism's path of change is contingent to its own history of interactions which determines what will constitute a possible perturbation and path of structural change. An organism behaves "perfectly": Its behaviour at any moment is entirely consistent with its structure and history (Dell, 1985). It is this which gives us the illusion that we can cause the behaviour of something or someone else. We have this experience when we successfully couple and establish a recurrent pattern of interaction which stabilizes into a coordinated "dance".

Since knowledge is derived from living, it becomes action, rather than contemplation, which is the foundation of all human knowledge. "If you desire to see, learn how to act", writes Von

Foerster (1985, p. 61). Knowledge founded upon and through action is the basis of Piaget's ideas about cognitive development (Piaget, 1980). Thus it is that knowledge is given in and through action--that the world becomes known to us, determined through us, created by us. The world becomes "real", full of objects for us--not because objects exist "out there", but because in and through our actions we meet and discover the limits, the constraints to what is possible for us to do and accomplish. Even our own "subjectivity" is a distinction in language, not a pure rational process existing apart from the world to which it is coupled. There is no sharp dividing line between subject and object, except of course in our distinctions in language: Ontologically we move back and forth between the world of "I-It" and "I-Thou". As human beings our very existence is there, on that "narrow ridge". Man is not a "possessor" of consciousness upon which the world is deposited, or a spectator, separate from the world: He is always already with the world which does not exist without him, nor he without it. They are co-determining, and simultaneous (Freire, 1986), caught up together in a tangled loop.

Since knowledge is intersubjective we can have no objectivity. We can have no access to some absolute truth independent of the distinctions by which we bring forth the world, and we have no basis upon which to wage war over whose version of reality is correct, whose truth is ultimate. What we have is a reality generated through consensual agreement, through dialogue with others. The compensation for this loss of a secure, objective universe is that we have in its place a multiverse of many possibilities, all equally lovely. Because language is closed--because we live within our own distinctions--we lose the hope of a transcendent kind of knowing. What we gain is the possibility through dialogue of a richer, multilingual knowing. While we cannot step outside the domain of our distinctions, we can from the inside, in dialogue, push it to new fullness and new depth. This has been, historically, the task of hermeneutics--to bring into language the hidden possibilities of common words, to work the traditions handed down to us in new ways, to create through dialogue with eachother and with our verbal tradition a new "naming of the world". (Gadamer, 1976; Palmer, 1969.)

Words cannot of course be used in just any way we wish, or we risk speaking meaningless gibberish. But words do not have specified univocal meanings either: They do not correspond denotatively to objects "out there" in the world in any specific way. We are constrained by the tradition of a word's use, but the speaking of something novel or surprising absolutely depends upon the expanding of the circle of meaning of a word and its use in unusual contexts. It is this element of the "random" introjected into the play of tradition which keeps language alive as dialogue. (see Grammatical Man, by Campbell, 1982, for a fascinating review of this whole idea.)

If in our naming of the world we seek understanding, we must operate hermeneutically: We must continually return to the life of dialogue which generates our distinctions. The world itself does not operate according to laws or theories: It is not, for example, held together by "causal glue" (Hudson, 1972). Our theories are valid in the domain of our descriptions. They are maps, not the territory. (Bateson, 1972.)

If we understand all human knowledge, right from the infant's earliest sensorimotor coordinations to the scientist's hypotheses, as an effort to construct from an otherwise amorphous experience, an orderly, predictable world which can be understood in common with others--to make a map, in other words--we find ourselves moving into an epistemological position which philosophers (eg., Von Glaserfeld, 1984) have been calling "radical constructivism". The basic position of radical constructivists (eg., Von Glaserfeld, 1984; Watzlawick, 1984.) is that all knowledge is exclusively an ordering of our own experience, and that the world, which appears to operate in an orderly, predictable, and lawful fashon, does so unavoidably because it is none other than the world which we ourselves created and ordered out of our own experience. Our experiential world is lawful because that is how we operate: We have made it so. What we observe is the world of our experience.

For Von Glaserfeld this is no call for skeptical despair, for while we can never know a world outside our constructions upon which we might "validate" our constructions, our constructions can be more or less "fitting" ways of describing our experience. That is, those ideas which stand the test of experience, which allow us to successfully achieve our goals, are useful, and in the Darwinian sense, "fitting". They tell us nothing about the world "as it really is", but they do tell us that they are, as ideas, viable navigational tools in that world. Those ideas which allow us to navigate successfully to our goals "survive"--or get reinforced, or whatever terminology one wishes to impose here. We get reinforced in other words for having a particular theory when it allows us to predict a certain event (eg., the sun will rise tomorrow, or whatever), and the more that theory gets reinforced, the more likely we then are to assume that our theory is "correct"--that the world really does operate according to our theory. Our tendency to do this--to attribute this validation to an objective world and to conclude that the world is held together by the laws we use to describe it--is to obscure the boundary between two fundamentally separate phenomenal domains. C.S. Lewis, in a powerful and humorous argument, wrote:

> "...And that wave, though it certainly moved according to the laws of physics, was not moved by them. It was shoved by other waves and by winds, and so forth. And however far you traced the story back you would never find the laws of nature causing anything.

> The dazzlingly obvious conclusion now arose in my mind: in the whole history of the universe the laws of nature have never produced a single event. .... Up till now I had had a vague idea that the laws of nature could make things happen. I now saw that this was exactly like thinking that you could increase your income by doing sums about it." (The Laws of Nature, 1979, p. 53)

The real world is manifested to us only as a constraint--an outer limit--which selects out unviable ideas. There, where our theories break down, where we are shipwrecked by the unfittingness of our navigational map, the so-called real world stands. That which survives is fitting, or adaptive, but no more so than many other ideas which might be proposed to account for the same experience, just as there are many variations by which organisms maintain their adaptation to a given medium without any one being any more "right" at it than any other. Bateson warned, years ago:

> "Frequency of validation of an idea within a given segment of time is not the same as proof that the idea is either true or pragmatically useful over a long time. We are discovering today that several of the premises which are deeply engrained in our way of life are simply untrue and become

> pathogenic when implemented with modern technology." (1972, p. 502)

While theory allows us to organize the world of our experience, it can also blind us to those aspects of experience which remain outside the theory's domain of explanation. Like a map, a theory contains only those elements which allow us to arrive at our goals. Those aspects of the topography which do not pertain to our present trip, regardless of how beautiful or worthwhile they might be on another trip, for another person, or at another time, do not appear on the map. There are various different ways to map out the same territory, depending upon our own interests: A fisherman's map and a railway surveyor's map of the same region look very different! The problem when it comes to theoretical maps is that when our own interests are vested with some extraordinary authority (as scientists' are in this culture), we begin to regard our different maps not as only different, but some as more "right" than others. Furthermore, aspects of our experience which are contrary to our maps, are too easily dismissed as irrelevant, as exceptions to the rule, or as inexplicable anomalies which are of minor importance. It becomes easier for us to invalidate our own experience than to change our maps.

When experience, from which our theories are generated in the first place, fails to validate our theories, it is the theories which should be changed. This has always been the foundation of scientific progress: All great achievements have emerged from revolutionary shifts in existing theory, and it has been the exceptions to the rule which previous theory could not explain, which have frontlined the shift. (Kuhn, 1970).

In the social sciences, our desire for prediction and control has led to an empirically based psychology which attempts to discover the "facts" about human behaviour, as if our nature could be found among the facts we so generate by forgetting that someone--ie., ourselves--had to generate them in the first place. But if our facts are collected from theoretical frameworks which determine a priori what will constitute an answer to their questions, then they are not to be found pure and unviolated "out there", ready for gathering. We have known this for some time, but it is an uneasy truce we have made with this knowledge. We have the work of Orne (1971) and Rosenthal (1971) in our own discipline to confirm that what we expect to see is what we see. We also have the work of Heisenberg (1958) in physics to confirm that we cannot have exact knowledge of any phenomenon: We cannot know, for example, the speed of a subatomic particle and its position in space. To know one we must sacrifice knowing the other. He wrote: "What we observe is not nature herself, but nature exposed to our method of questionning." (1958, p. 58) We cannot know everything. Always, we know only that which our theories allow us to navigate through: We cannot see what we cannot see--we cannot step outside our theorizing. Every theory is only at best a frame through which we see a particular view. Other views are not given to us, unless we change the frame. C.S. Lewis speaks again:

> "But nature gives most of her evidence in answer to the questions we ask her. Here, as in the courts, the character of the evidence depends on the shape of the examination, and a good cross examiner can do wonders. He will not elicit falsehoods from an honest witness. But, in relation to the total truth in the witness's mind, the structure of the examination is like a stencil. It determines how much of that total truth will appear and what pattern it will suggest." (The Discarded Image, 1964, p. 223)

Wittgenstein echoes, with these words:

> "One thinks that one is tracing the outlines of nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing around the frame through which we looked at her." (Philosophical Investigations 1, p. 114)

And again:

> "My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them,

> on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)"
> (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 1951)

We cannot not theorize. Without words, without theories, we have no frame to climb upon, no world to see, no language to share. "The whole point of seeing through something", writes C.S. Lewis, "is to see something through it." (The Abolition of Man, 1943, p. 48).

Radical constructivism allows us to "see something through it" without having to be committed to the timeless inerracy of it. Finally, it takes us that crucial step towards realizing the unity of the sciences in the experience of the observer. A "hermeneutic" of science--which radical constructivism is--brings forth a meta-domain under which all of man's activities, including his scientific ones, can be understood. As long as psychology struggles under the old methods which physics long ago abandoned (Zukav, 1979), it produces a picture of a statistical man which leaves little room for the creative, languaging, theorizing, self-aware observer who produced it.

A hermeneutic approach does just that. This is, I think, the "new root metaphor" which Hudson (1972) and others (Heather, 1976; Shotter, 1975) have called for.

E. Towards a Hermeneutic of Psychotherapy

At this point it might be helpful to return briefly to my initial question, which had to do with why psychotherapy works, what we are doing as therapists when we claim to be doing psychotherapy, and what our clients might have to say about all this. The preceding arguments may seem like a rather obscure route to my destination, but my story is not complete without them. My purpose is two-fold: First, to trace my own journey towards understanding, along with the many assumptions and preunderstandings which I brought to this story--as a way of showing my reader the view through my own chosen "frame"; Secondly, to build upon the ideas of the people who have so influenced my own thinking to develop what I hope is a solid foundation for the "methodology" of this story.

It seems to me that much of what we call psychotherapy has been built on the idea that therapists change their clients, and that they do this through the proper application of their methods. Where this happens by mutual consent, where clients agree to be helped in such a manner and then appear to benefit as a result, there would appear to be no harm done, only good. The success of the methods is then taken for granted as the agent of change. The danger of this is that it reinforces the therapist's commitment to continue to see things that way in the future, with different clients who may rightly resist such a coupling.

The list of "psychotherapies" which has been generated in the last couple of decades by well-meaning therapists is an embarrassing testimony to the silliness of our infatuation with methods. There is scarcely any conceivable human activity which has not been converted to some form of psychotherapy--and the list continues to grow, with everyone who adds to it convinced that their discovery really works. It could almost be humorous if it were not for the hubris which so often accompanies these new methods, and which so often disguises the client's role in the determination of change.

If we take to heart the work of the cyberneticians and philosophers whose ideas I have sketched here, we realize that we cannot **make** people change. Our methods cannot **make** people change. We do not discover what is wrong with people, or why they behave the way they do. We do not and cannot see the whole marvelous history of interactions which **are** this person who seeks our guidance, and we cannot say "it is this" or "it is that" which caused their problem. It is not this or that, but everything, the whole fabric of their life, past and present, in all its intricacy. The problem itself comes to stand in the words with which it is languaged between the therapist and the client. This can mislead us, for in language we operate in forgetfulness of the distinctions by which we bring our world forth. We assume, because language is a language of objects, that our words actually denote things "out there". But there is no thing "out there" which is a family hierarchy, or an ego. We are looking "in" on our own domain of interactions when we use these words, not "out" upon the client.

The idea that the therapist has a picture of a client or a family which is more right than the client's, is another consequence of our hubris, and can mistakenly lead us to "name the world" for others and rob them of their right to their own vision of reality. Our descriptions as therapists are no more "right" than the client's, and if we rob our clients of their own words, we destroy the chance for consensual understanding. We cannot hear the client who has been robbed of a voice.

If the problems which therapists deal with in therapy are problems which have been brought to distinction in language, we must be careful how we speak. The problems which we bring forth and "treat" are our responsibility! The words we choose are the windows through which people's lives are revealed to us. Clearly, we must use words, or there is no communication, but we must operate lovingly with those words with a passion not to change our clients but to understand them. And we achieve that understanding not by imposing our own words, or by destroying theirs, but by strengthening the words of both, that together we move towards "partnership", or consensus, in naming the world.

4. The Hermeneutical Encounter

A. Towards a Theory of Understanding

The idea that we understand anything--other people, or our clients, included--by rendering them into objects of our dissociated scrutiny, leads us to assume as well that we understand best when we leap out of our own universe of understanding and somehow into theirs, vacating in the process our own ground of distinctions, our own prejudices, and preunderstandings. This is the whole foundation of the scientific method: prejudiceless observation. It is not surprising then, with such assumptions, that we trust our methods to do that for us, to cleanse us of bias, and reveal the world of the other in its purity. This is true of us when we operate as scientists, and it is also true of us when we operate as psychotherapists seeking understanding. This is an honourable intent I think, but it is also mistaken. We do not, and cannot, step outside our own universe of distinctions. How then do we understand another's experience? How do we escape the solitude of complete solipsism?

These questions are relevant to my present purpose in two ways. If psychotherapy is the art of understanding another's experience we need to know how it is we can claim to understand. Secondly, in the story which follows, I will be seeking understanding of the experience of people who have gone for psychotherapy and who have been helped. I would like to show now how I think this is even possible, given the frame which I have been building. Do we understand things, people, the world, by using methods which rid us of our own outlook, or is there an alternative beyond complete solipsism? This is the question to which I now turn. In anticipation of a fuller argument which is to follow, I would like to state that I do not believe that the only alternative is solipsistic despair. Because we are beings in language, because as human beings our existence is constituted by the interhuman, because as human beings our nature is to be known in the history of linguistic interaction which is the domain of "the between", the world is already given to us in the language we learn and use. The world and language are simultaneous for us. It is language itself which is the connecting medium of our understanding. The world we learn when we learn language is the "common" world. The whole function of language it seems to me is that in it we turn towards one another, not away and onto the world of objects, and that we come to understand one another, not that we use the language as a system of signs to denote things "out there". Language would be dead if it were simply a system of rigid denotations or one-to-one correspondence with objects in the world--such is the language of technical correspondence, not the language of human dialogue. Language is inherently in-folded upon itself, and where it is alive it is because in its function between us, it is continuously in transformation, as we ourselves are.

The cyberneticians and philosophers whose ideas I have so heavily borrowed in the previous section have not been the first to wrestle with this whole problem of observer-dependent knowledge, nor the first to wrestle with the problem of language and understanding as both the problem to be explained and simultaneously the medium of explanation. This wonderful recursive loop has fascinated writers in the fields of hermeneutics, possibly it seems, for centuries. To them I now turn. What I want to do here, in preparation for the last half of this dissertation, is briefly trace the development of hermeneutics both as the science of interpretation and as the phenomenology of language and understanding. I hope to show that philosophical hermeneutics, in the tradition of Heidegger and Gadamer, is an exciting counterpart to the ontology of the neuro-cyberneticians, and another distinct voice in the call to understanding in the life of dialogue. It is fascinating to me how in the overall movement of tradition so many separate voices, each working in the language and medium of their own time and place, are carried along in such glorious harmony, each one articulating in the way only it can, its own song, but flowing smoothly and musically into the others. So it seems, for me at least, when I read the works of the cyberneticians, and then the works of Buber, and Freire, and finally, the hermeneutics of Gadamer.

In The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century (1962), Gadamer traces the emergence of a new "epochal awareness" which "welded the nineteenth century into a unit of the past", and with it, the entire philosophical tradition from Liebniz through Kant, to Hegel. "Hegel's philosophy", he writes, "represents the last mighty attempt to grasp science and philosophy as a unity." (p. 108-110) For Gadamer, the philosophical foundation of this century is the growing skepticism against the dogmatism of science, with its subjectivism and its reduction of the world to objects of impartial observation and control, and, correspondingly, the emergence of the phenomenological movement. He traces through writers like Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, and Freud, a radical undercutting of the possibility of pure knowledge in the subjectivity of human consciousness. With the phenomenological movement came the task of reuniting subject and object, and of specifying the limits of knowledge. With it came the task of trying to understand the historicality and temporality of human experience, and of building a new foundation for the historical sciences: one which began with man's historicality rather than ignoring it or obliterating it with a-historical, scientific methods.

Husserl's famous slogan "To the things themselves!" epitomized the new attempt to recover some sense of the pre-reflective givenness of things, and of the pre-reflective life-world within which object and subject are no longer alienated. In his transcendental phenomenology, in which one "brackets" the existence of the world "out there", thus rejecting the naive realism of the sciences, phenomena are recovered in correlation with the acts of consciousness in which they are constituted. Phenomena are not in the world "out there", nor are they "in the mind": They are in experience, in the life-world which is the synthesis of the two.

It is difficult to define the phenomenological movement with any precision, but in general it seems that the task phenomenology sets for itself is the recovery through careful methods of "reduction", the phenomenon "in itself". Now, this is a different event than the scientific one of observing the object "in itself": The scientific object is distinguished as "out there". The "thing in itself" of phenomenological reduction is the thing as it presents itself to our experience, after all our prejudgments are stripped away, and the horizons within which it appears are peeled back. (Keen, 1975)

Gadamer's hermeneutics, following in the line of Heidegger, has responded somewhat differently to the crisis of this modern epoch, and has developed for itself a different task. For Gadamer, as we will see, one's historical and human embeddedness are the horizons in which understanding is constituted, and the phenomena do not exist beneath or behind them, but within them. They are one's understanding. For Gadamer the task of hermeneutics became the development of a phenomenology of language and understanding.

Hermeneutics, according to Webster, is "the study of the methodological principles of interpretation and explanation; specif: the study of the general principles of biblical interpretation." The derivation of the word seems to be in the Greek **hermeneuein** which means "to interpret", and which alludes to the messenger-god Hermes whose job it was to bring understanding to mortals, to render the words of the gods intelligible and meaningful. (Palmer, 1969). Hoy (1978) quotes Socrates as saying that:

> "Hermes, the god who invented language and speech could be called interpreter or messenger, but also thief, liar, or contriver....Words, Socrates says, have the power to reveal, but they also conceal; speech can signify all things, but it also turns things this way and that." (The Critical Circle, p.1)

Even here, as early as Socrates, we hear a warning about the double-edged power of words, and we catch a hint of the controversy about language which was to rage through the discipline of hermeneutics centuries later.

Hermeneutics, as a discipline, was a 17th century development, concerned initially with the principles and methods of correct interpretation of biblical texts, and later with the interpretation of other literary texts. However, the practice of interpretating tradition was hardly an innovation of that century: the entire history of theology before the 17th century can be seen as an attempt to work out the meaning of proclamations of faith for each new generation, of handing down the traditions intact but meaningfully.

Furthermore, hermeneutics, as a discipline, was not to end there, with the interpretation of ancient texts. While the early scholars assumed the "immediacy of the claim to meaning" for the hearers of biblical proclamation (Hoy, 1978), this optimism was later thrown into doubt by the "discovery of the demonic side of Hermes", by a radical doubt about the very possibility of achieving true understanding. David Linge (1976) writes that hermeneutics has its beginnings "in breaches in intersubjectivity"--in the experience of alienation from the meaning of a particular work (whether that work be the bible, direct conversation, or a work of art), and the history of hermeneutics is then the history of various efforts to bridge that alienation. Palmer (1969) also writes:

> "The text may be separated in its subject from us by time, space, language, and other barriers to understanding....The task of interpretation must be to make something that is unfamiliar, distant, and obscure in meaning into something real, near, and intelligible." (p. 14)

But **how** is this to be done? How do we achieve understanding? Is it through the proper application of strict methods of interpretation that we bridge that gap which alienates us from a text? What if the "text" to be understood is not a literary text but a legal one, or perhaps not even a written text, but a work of art? What is understanding, and how is it achieved? These became the questions which occupied the writers from the time of Schleiermacher onwards, and which still today motivate debate. These became the foundation of "philosophical hermeneutics" (as opposed to methodological hermeneutics) and a whole new quest for an "understanding of understanding" itself. These were the kinds of questions which concerned Heidegger and Gadamer, and which concern me in this study.

The debate in hermeneutics today--although I cannot hope to do it justice here--has to do with how we achieve understanding. There are those writers, like Hirsch and Betti who believe that understanding is achieved by recontructing the author's intention through rigorous methods and principles of interpretation, and that validity and objectivity of interpretation absolutely depend upon the correctness of that reconstruction. For Hirsch and Betti, there is a distance between interpreter and text--a historical and ontological distance--which is an impediment to understanding, and which must be bridged by correct methodology. This is the distance of subject over object: By staying within the traditional epistemological assumptions which have guided science since Descartes, they look for the truth, or the meaning, of the text "out there" as an object to be grasped. Hirsch and Betti follow in the line of Schleiermacher and Dilthey in this regard: They look to hermeneutics to provide the logic and norms of validity and to bestow upon the practices of interpretation a "scientific" kind of objectivity.

In contrast, if one looks to the text not as an object which somehow carries and is inseparable from its author's intention, but as a work which stands on its own and is its own message, which carries its own intention, then a work is no longer simply an objectification of its author's subjectivity, but a distinct voice which speaks. We can escape the subject-object language which traps writers like Hirsch and Betti in arguments over correct methods. The goal of hermeneutics becomes interpretive dialogue with the text--dialogue with it as a distinct "other". Hoy speaks with clarity on this point:

> "The intention is thus not something different from the poem, nor does it "accompany" the poem. It is the poem. Yet it is what the poem shows, not just what it says. That is why people often look beyond the text for the author's intention: they have not yet seen what is being shown." (1978, p. 40)

For Gadamer, who stands clearly within the tradition of Heidegger, the event of understanding is not something which happens between the consciousness of interpreter and author, but an event that happens between interpreter and text where the interpreter's own historicity and bias are not impediments to be obliterated but the precondition and indeed very essence of understanding. One cannot understand any text "as it is": There is no way it really is. A text's being--its life, and its meaning--lies in what it is able to say, which is not any single "thing" but a variety of things. Its history of interpretation is a history of many different interpretations, all of which belong to its meaning as a work. Every time a work is understood, it is understood differently, and all are valid.

For Gadamer, tradition--and verbal tradition--is like a river flowing continuously between generations. We cannot step outside it. All of our interpretations, every event of understanding, is an event within the tradition, which the tradition itself makes possible in the first place. There is no "gulf" separating us from the past, or for that matter from one another. History is the medium which connects, not the source of separation. When we understand a text, or a work, we enter into that tradition, that continuous mediation of past and present: Our own pre-understandings, from which we start, are themselves given by the tradition, and our new understandings add to it. Our pre-understandings are what opens up a direction for us to question the text, and are the precondition of all understanding.

In true hermeneutical experience, understanding is not a kind of conceptual "knowing about" which has as its goal the accumulation of "all the facts". On the contrary, real understanding culminates in a continued openness to experience, a continued questionning. There is always an element of "not knowing" which allows the new and surprising to be heard.

The essence of hermeneutical experience is dialogue--whether it is with a text, a work of art, or with a living, present person. In dialogue we seek to locate some sense of the common question which addresses us, and we play it, or rather, allow it to be played further through us, through our dialogue. If it is a text, we try to locate the questions, the subject matter, with which it is concerned, and for which it is an answer. If it is an art work, we attempt to locate the question for which its world is an expression. If it is another person, we try to locate the question which we have in common, which addresses us, which calls us forth in "I-Thou". There is always a subject matter which can be played further, which our questionning opens up and reveals. When the partner in this process is a person, the full presence of that person is essential to the dialogue. The stronger this partner is in the dialogue, the better, for it is this strength which dialogue seeks to strengthen. The truth to be unveiled absolutely depends upon it. The unveiling of the new and the surprising arises from it. One must really hear the other in order for one's own experience to be fully articulated, and it is against this that the subject matter--the logos--unfolds. The hermeneutic experience is not a denial or obliteration of our self and our horizons, or of the other, but a strengthening of each, and a building of a "between". There is a sense in which the subject matter--rich with possibilities, full of unseen directions--carries the dialogue, and carries the participants with it. Like a game, Gadamer says, we are played by it, we are lost to it, we are bouyed along by its own movement. This is the wonderful working of tradition and of language in our midst. We do not choose the words with which we play: They too have been given to us by tradition itself, along an infinity of things which can be said through them. And it is this which is the task of hermeneutics: To bring some of those possibilities to light in language.

In this kind of dialogue--in fact, in all dialogue--the words we use do not convey "information". They reveal a world, and an inner infinity of things which can be brought to light within that world. Language in this sense is not denotative, and truth is no longer propositional. Language is not used to describe the world "out there", but to disclose that inner infinity of the unsaid. Meaning and truth are to be located not in correct representations, or matches between subject and object: They arise **between** us as we operate hermeneutically, when we bring a world to language between us. We understand each other when we have pushed the subject matter as far as we can, and no more can be said. Palmer speaks:

> "Such is the saying power of language that it creates the world within which everything may be disclosed; such is its comprehensiveness that we can understand the most diverse worlds that have come to expression in language; such is its disclosing power that even a relatively

> short text can lay open a world different from our own yet one which we are able to understand." (1969, p. 207)

All understanding follows this path of the hermeneutic circle. Living, knowing, and dialogue are all fundamentally hermeneutical, self-reflexive.

I now turn to the central focus of this whole story: the dialogues which I had with the clients who met with me.

B. My Partners in Dialogue

The process of finding partners in dialogue was a fascinating experience for me, and one which deserves brief comment. My first two participants came to me because they knew me personally, and had heard me mention what my research was about. They had both been in therapy, (not with me however), and had had very positive experiences which they were willing to share with me. Finding the other six participants (there were eight altogether) was not as easy. I did not want to find my participants by advertising, first of all because I did not want the task of trying to select which people to interview if I happened to be deluged with replies, and secondly, because I hoped to have some small measure of control over who the therapists were. There was a precious balance in all of this which I wanted to maintain. I did not want to too arbitrarily determine who my participants would be: I wanted there to be some measure of "serendipity" to the arrangments, so that I might be surprised by the encounters. But I also realized that there would be more interest for me, and more variety, if I had a selection of participants who had had different therapists, and not only different therapists, but therapists of different theoretical persuasions. I also thought it would be interesting to have both men and women as participants, and for them to have had experiences with both male and female therapists.

I was not sure initially how many people I wanted to interview, but I began this whole process by approaching therapists, all of whom were psychologists whose work I knew something about, and who I thought might give a good cross-section both of kinds of work, and kinds of clients. I told them very briefly about my interest in contacting clients who had been helped by therapy and who would be willing to talk to me about it. I did not specify anything more than that, or any other characteristic except, firstly, that they had been helped, and secondly that they would be willing to talk to me. On two occasions I asked specifically for a particular sex, but I indicated that I would accept the other. It was important to me not to impose any particular view of what kind of client I was looking for.

The response I got varied from total lack of interest in being involved, to initial interest but no referral, to great enthusiasm. As time went along I found it necessary to approach more therapists, and gradually found a total of eight who were enthusiastic enough about my work to refer me one client each.

The therapists themselves, how and why I selected them, need brief mention. Six of them were men, two women. It might have been "better" to have more women represented here, but it did not work out that way. While I had approached an equal number of male and female therapists, my referrals did not come in equal numbers from both, and in the end I was pleased to have found the eight clients I did have. One of the male therapists I did not know at all, except of course through the descriptions of the client I interviewed. All of them were psychologists.

Among these eight therapists is a therapist who works in a student counselling setting, one who is in a rehabilitation setting, five who are in private practice, and one who is a doctoral student in counselling psychology. Two of them I know well enough to say that they operate from a rather "strategic" therapy perspective, the others I am not sure about. I did not interview them about what they thought they had done to help the client they had sent to me, nor did I question them about their general theoretical perspectives--although I see in retrospect that this might have been an interesting direction to pursue. At the time I took the referrals I was only interested in talking to the clients, without eliciting any other miscellaneous information. I wanted to remain open to whatever possibiities presented themselves without thinking in advance "oh, this is what I'll hear because this therapist always does such and such a kind of therapy."

I had two outstanding comments from therapists at the time of my initial approach. One enthusiastically and quickly thought of a client to refer to me, but couldn't help telling me that the client would probably not be able to tell me what had happened that had made a difference because the "real reason" for change would have been beyond awareness. Another therapist quickly thought of several people who had been helped, but was not sure any of them would be suitable because of the rather simple or concrete nature of the therapy. The concern here was that it wasn't really "therapy" in the usual sense.

My partners in dialogue--the participants in this study, and the co-creators of the script which follows--were four men and four women ranging in age from 18 to 55. There was a cross-section of academic and vocational backgrounds among both the men and the women: some very highly educated and rather sophisticated, some in positions of prestige, some with little or no education, some with no work at all, some students. The problems which they had taken to therapy also varied. I did not set out to deliberately examine these in great detail, though in the course of every dialogue the unique nature of each problem of course unfolded. I do not want to label any of these, for that is not my purpose here. However, if it helps to set some context for the reader, I can say that the problems varied from serious depression, social withdrawal and suicidal thoughts, to overwhelming anxiety, confusion, despair, feelings of futility and lostness, debilitating eating disturbance, inability to leave the house. My sense was that these were the real people who appear in therapist's offices every day; They were not the "easy" ones. All of them had been helped, and claimed so enthusiastically and without qualification. All of them had experienced relief from the problems which they took to therapy. All of them were gracious, and seemed pleased to talk to me.

Each one of these people was unique, and each had something important to say to me. Several of them had been in previous therapy experiences which had been unhelpful and which contrasted markedly with their experience of successful therapy. The length of the therapy varied among the participants from a handful of sessions spread across several weeks, to a dozen or so sessions spread across a year. I am including all of them here: None have been arbitrarily weeded out. I committed myself before this started to describing exactly what I received, and reporting it all.

C. The Dialogues

I contacted each of the participants by phone after the therapist had had the opportunity to ask them if they were willing to participate and to be contacted by me. Each one of them knew briefly about my interest at the time of my first phone contact. No one declined to participate. I met with each of the participants at their convenience, either in their own homes or offices, or in mine. We made sure that we met where we would have complete privacy. I briefly explained the purpose of my research, how I would be using their experiences, and that details of their experience which might identify either them or others would be removed to maintain confidentiality. I explained that I needed to audiotape the interview, and why. I also explained that I was interested in their experience of what had made a difference in their therapy, and that it was important for me to feel that I really understood what they had to tell me. I explained that it might take me some time to find the questions which worked for us, and that they should feel free to redirect me if my questions somehow missed the mark. I told them that they did not have to share with me any details about their problems which they felt might compromise their privacy, or that of their family or friends. I also warned them that my questions might at times seem to ask the ridiculously obvious, but that I would do that to be sure I really understood. At the time of this "preamble" I also asked them to sign a "consent to participate" form which explained the purpose of the interview and the use to which it would be put.

I began every interview with the same question: "What do you think happened in your therapy which made a difference for you?" After that, I had no standard questions, and no standard areas I pried into. Every interview took its own unique course depending upon the lead of the client. My only predetermined goal in these interviews was to try as much as I could to allow the client's world to be brought forth in whatever language and form they wished, to not violate that form by adding premature comments or conceptualizations of my own. This was an important balance to strike: To be present and involved myself, but to allow the dialogue to find a life and a pace of its own; to risk my own understandings as I sought clarification, but to allow the dialogue to lead me. I tried to pay attention to the idiosyncratic words and metaphors each client used, and I asked questions which used these words and pushed these metaphors to the fullest. I found, interestingly, that the main hindrance to achieving that effortless flow, was my own penchant for translating the participant's experience into the horizon I occupy as a theorist about therapy. There were times, as the dialogues will attest, when that deafness led the conversation into a "theoretical" dialogue "about therapy", rather than a dialogue about the participant's own experience. This was a danger of which I was aware from a previous "pilot interview" I had done, and which I tried to avoid. The pilot interview had convinced me that a structured interview of pre-selected questions could become brief and stagnant very quickly, and that the unique experience of each client could be deadened by a rigid application of my own line of questionning. I learned that the questions arose spontaneously and effortlessly only when I abandoned an arbitrary course of my own, and remained open to the leading of the dialogue.

My sense is that I was fairly active in these interviews, asking for clarifications, for examples of concepts which were not entirely clear to me, and for meanings which were not immediately obvious. This was as important for all the many "obvious" distinctions (words such as "care", "listening", "understanding", "talking it out", "acceptance", to name only a few), as it was for the more obscure distinctions. In fact, my own sense is that these more simple distinctions were often the ones hardest to pin down, and that they were definitely not as uniform in their meanings as our casual use of them implies. They did not point unequivocally to a particular or common experience, but to a whole range of experiences. And it was precisely this which I wanted to work out in these dialogues.

So, I had the sense that as we began the interviews we spoke different languages to some extent, that we used common words in slightly different ways to refer to slightly different experiences, and that sometimes the most apparently innocuous phrase or taken-for-granted idea was the one which, when pushed and pulled and examined from other sides, suddenly revealed the most surprising insights. Then towards the end of the interview, there came, at least for me, a satisfying sense that we were speaking a more common language, that I really understood what was being spoken. There was one exception to this: With one of the participants I had a greater sense that I was still struggling a bit towards the end, and that I had not achieved that quiet understanding which so characterized the other dialogues. I have still included that dialogue here of course, for even it illuminates the experience of psychotherapy, inspite of our "missed connection".

There were times throughout the dialogues when I might suggest a metaphor, or provide an example which suddenly seemed to "fit", and out of my language, more ideas seemed to spring. It really was a dialogue in that sense, not just a passive receiving of their words. There was often an animated exchange, a "working together" to try to get to the heart of what needed to be said. Sometimes there was a sense, I think for both of us, that the right words had not been found, that more could be said, and we struggled with it together to find the right questions to ask. For both of us there was often a sense that we were really discovering something new together. Several clients who began by telling me that they didn't know what had made a difference, felt that they did know by the end of the dialogue, and for several this revelation was thrilling. This is the very essence of the hermeneutical experience it seems to me: To bring the hidden into language, and to come to understanding through dialogue. There really was a sense for me throughout these dialogues that I was finding out something I had not known before. I am sure that this was also true of the participants. There were many times when comments came such as "You know, I hadn't thought of it this way before, but....", or when together we would hit on a particular expression and one would say "that's it!....that's what it was like!"

There were times when the dialogues seemed to bog down, when we seemed to come to the end of speaking, and suddenly some passing remark brought a whole new world of possibilities. Usually it seemed to me that these flat moments before the spark occurred when we left unturned a particular word or phrase which we both assumed had some fixed meaning which fully and finally conveyed the essence of the experience. When we realized that those were the very words which needed to be examined further, new insights came. On the whole, the dialogues were full of a spontaneity and bouyancy which I found exhilarating. I learned a lot, not only about the experiences of these wonderful people, but also about myself, and about how to ask questions.

I think that for all the participants, the opportunity to bring some of their therapy experience to language was truly enjoyable. All of them told me that it was a pleasure to be involved, and I truly believe they meant it. Several even expressed their surprise at how helpful the experience had been to them. One of the participants said this, at the end of our dialogue:

> "To have the feeling, as you're doing right now,
> that someone is going beyond the simple words, and
> going to the heart of what the person is, that's
> very healing--even socially, or in this research."

I responded:

> "This process that we're in right now, of me trying to understand what you think....what do you think?....Am I understanding you?

The response:

> "Yes! That's what I'm trying to say! Like right now I'm shaking. I'm not exactly sure why, but it's like an emotional shaking, like something's happening that's positive....

My response:

> "Like sort of resonating together?

My partner:

> "I think that if therapy was like this it might be awfully draining for the therapist...or maybe not! Maybe in therapy, like this, it fills both of the participants!"

I asked all of the participants, (except for Frank, who was the participant from whom I still felt slightly disconnected at the end of our second dialogue) if they felt that I had really understood them, and that we had really understood eachother. All of them said yes, confirming my own definite sense towards the end of each dialogue that we had reached some consensus. The dialogues varied in length ~~from~~ about an hour and a quarter to about three hours--whatever it took to get to that magical point of consensus.

Three of them spanned across two sessions of dialogue. We stopped when there seemed to be no more to be said.

I also got some unsolicited feedback from several of the therapists who had referred participants to me. One commented that the client had been so moved by the experience, and the gains made in therapy had been so solidified through the experience, that it should become a necessary part of everyone's therapy experience to dialogue about it afterwards. Several others simply commented on what a positive experience it had been for their clients who had called them afterwards to thank them for referring them to me.

After I had written the first draft of my "results" section (the "Themes" which follow), I circulated a copy to each of the participants, and I contacted each of them by phone or in person to obtain some sense of their reaction to what I had written about our dialogues. With one exception, Frank, who felt that I had not completely captured his experience, the participants felt very gratified that the written document had remained so faithful to their own experience, and had highlighted the essence of their understanding in such a way as to make it come alive for them once again. I had decided before I circulated "The Themes" that for the sake of this piece of work I would close the hermeneutic circle after my interpretation of the original, transcibed dialogues. The reader can see I hope that the process might continue in several cycles, and even then without any final closure. I could have reinterpreted the dialogues again and again, each time recycling the written document back to the participants for review and for editing. I chose not to do this, partially because there must come at some point that step of closure, that moment of commitment when one says "This is my understanding of what took place between us." More importantly however, I had felt so enormously satisfied with the original dialogues, and with our ability in each coupling to arrive at a place of mutual understanding, that I wanted to hold onto those dialogues as the "text" to be interpreted.

D. Bringing Forth a Reality Through Dialogue

I would now like to describe the process by which I arrived at the results which are to follow. What I am going to describe was not the result of a borrowed methodology: I take responsibility for this creation. I grappled for many long hours--and days--with how I should present these dialogues, with what form they should be presented in, with what structure I might best preserve their "alive-ness" as dialogues. There is of course a wonderful sense of movement and discovery which accompanied the dialogues as they unfolded, and which the audiotapes preserve, and for me the process of recreating them here needed to preserve some of that, as well as some sense of the unique and unrepeatable in each. There is no doubt that the transcipts are themselves rich, coherent, and meaningful. The simplest solution might have been to present the transcripts themselves, but for reasons which I hope to explain, I decided against this. First of all, they were too long, and in some places full of details which would have identified the participants. Secondly, the typed transcripts are flattened in tone and texture, and they do not actually convey the full sense of the living dialogues. But there are other reasons going far beyond this. While the reader might well wish to see the transcripts for herself to determine for herself what they "mean", this only raises another problem: Many descriptions of those transcipts may be equally valid, but in the end, this whole dissertation is about my bringing forth of meaning. It is, as I stated from the outet, my story. My intent is not to present all the possible "multiverses" which might arise from a single transcript, but to faithfully present these dialogues as they have transformed my understanding. It is here, in the story of my own transformation, that the dialogues are preserved. Here, in my own expanded horizons, is that story which emerged "in the between". Understanding is always, as we have seen, a fusion of horizons, an encompassing of worlds.

The process of establishing dialogue with the transcripts--of dialoguing with the dialogues of which I was a part--was a fascinating one. There is of course the risk of moving away from the text, of superimposing my own categories and losing those of the participants, but this is an ever-present risk in all dialogue, out of which no methodology can "bootstrap" itself. The beauty of this "meta-dialogue" is that it conveys that sense of consensus and mutual understanding which was the culmination of the dialogues, and which no isolated portions of the text can possibly convey. This meta-dialogue allowed me to illuminate the original dialogues from the outside and to understand key phrases in the added light of the whole, to shift back and forth between text and context, using one to better understand the other. This process of shifting back and forth, of changing the focus from wide to narrow, of illuminating the parts against the whole and then the whole against the parts, allowed the participants' experience of therapy to emerge in a way which is missed in the isolated question and answer of the text. What I could not entirely see as the dialogues actually took place, was the universe of the "unsaid" or "yet-to-be-said" which undergirded each utterance. There is an integrity and wholeness to the dialogues which can only be grasped from the outside in dialogue with the transcript as a unity of meaning. In retrospect certain words or phrases which a participant used suddenly come alive in a way which eluded me at the time of the interview. One locates their meaning by locating the larger question to which they are responding, and one locates that larger question in the work as a whole.

The first step in bringing forth the results (the themes) which are to follow, was to immerse myself in the transcripts of the dialogues. I had actually made the transcripts myself in order that I could preserve some sense of where the pauses and silences were, where the intonation of the voice reflected great emotion or particular emphasis, and where the dialogue seemed to struggle or break down. These were significant moments for me which I did not want levelled out of the transcripts. It was still necessary for me to return to the tapes as well, and so began the dance with each tape and its transcript, listening to the words, to the voices speaking those words, and to the silences between. As I mentionned, there was a sense of "wholeness" to each dialogue, and my purpose in immersing myself in the transcripts was to recover that "wholeness", that consensus which was the culmination of each dialogue. This came with time, and patience, and a determination to let the dialogues "speak for themselves". Once I had this sense of the overall movement of a dialogue, I began to understand particular phrases or sentences differently. Ambiguous meanings became more clear when they were heard against other similar comments made later or earlier in the dialogue. Answers to my questions were suddenly more meaningful when I saw that they were nested within other questions as well which I had already asked, or was about to ask. Every answer was an answer to more than just that immediate question: It responded also to the unasked, it anticipated the movement of the dialogue which was yet to unfold, and it recalled the path of the dialogue through previous questions. Every answer was a working out of our common language, a building towards a consensus which had not yet been reached. A particular phrase or comment or answer to a question did not stand alone, but in the context of the finished work. It also stood in relation to the preunderstandings or biases which my own questions brought to the dialogue. This was not a monologue, and my own bias helped shape the movement of the conversation in some directions rather than others. And so, every exchange came into sharper focus for me through this meta-dialogue.

The next step was to summarize the dialogue, making summary statements for each exchange by locating its meaning in terms of the whole. My purpose here was to identify how the participant made distinctions about what was important in therapy, about what had made a difference. I can demonstrate with the following, an excerpt from my dialogue with Vi.

Dialogue	Summary
M: So, what do you think happened which you think made a difference?	
V: The first time I went for counselling what blew me away is that I didn't have to let the other person share their side of the story, that I was the only one that counted in the session, and, all I really wanted was someone to listen--that I didn't have to in turn listen to--that I could just talk, and they would pretend to be interested...someone	I was the only one who counted

to act like your life is interesting, and you don't have to socially return that gift....I very consciously went in saying "I'm paying for this person to listen to me"...

M: So you knew exactly what you wanted?

V: No, not before I went in, but after the first time I was just flying when I came out!

M: Why? Because he listened?

It feels great to be listened to!

V: Because I was listened to! And I'm verbose! I need someone to listen to me!

M: You said that you wanted someone even just to act as if they were interested. Would you know, or how would you know if someone was pretending to be interested, rather than genuinely interested?

V: I had that delighful experience not too long ago with what I'd call a pseudo-psychologist. He had the degrees, and he thought he was just marvelous, but he was so impressed with his own importance, and so impressed with the number of techniques he could use, that I felt I was being "techniqued", not listened to!

difference between being "techniqued" and being listened to

M: So, the time you went and thought you were really helped, did that therapist really listen?

V: nods yes

M: Okay, so you got the sense that that therapist really was interested, not just

acting as if....	
V: I cheated! I knew him a bit beforehand, and so I trusted him, and I knew that he wouldn't act as if he was interested. I mean, I knew he was a very deeply caring person and if he was listening, he was listening!	To really listen is a sign of caring
M: So you knew beforehand what he was going to be abe to give you? That he'd be interested, and you chose him in part knowing that?	
V: I knew he cared, but I didn't have any idea how that caring would come out.	It was important to find someone who cared
M: It was important to you then that he listen, and that he really care. But how did you know that... that he really cared?	
V: Body language. He was with me, leaning forward....You can make the same moves, but one you know is coming from the person, and one you know is coming from the mind. And so when he leaned forward, he was coming from the centre. And this other fellow this past year, he did the same kind of body language, but it was very peripheral.	caring comes through in body language
M: Maybe I know what you mean. Like, with the one, he moved because he cared, because he was interested, whereas someone else might move that way because it's the right technique to use right now?	
V: Yes! One is mind-directed. And to me I felt demeaned, and the feelings I had about	being "techniqued" is demeaning

	myself were reinforced. But when I went to the other fellow, I was feeling inadequate, and he made me feel important.	being listened to makes her feel important
M:	By being interested?	
V:	He had some fun ideas too. He had techniques I guess. He would pick up on what I was saying. The schedule was set by what I was saying, not by "now we're going to look at this..." I set the pace. There were no judgment calls. He didn't analyse me. He listened, and I could almost hear him thinking "you know, I bet this would help her see it more clearly"... or, No!...It was not her, it was we....	He followed her lead She set the pace He didn't prejudge or analyse her teamwork, "we"
M:	okay, so you were working on it together?	
V:	He didn't know the answers beforehand.	no preset answers
M:	So, if he had an idea, what would he do?	
V:	He'd say "Let's try..." The actual wording I don't know, but I can picture him saying "what do you think of this?" He never used the line "this has helped so and so, it'll help you." Nothing like that! I never felt with him that there was anyone else like me, and I like to think that I'm very unique, and maybe that's part of the feeling that he's really listening. "I've never heard this kind	cooperative style doesn't impose emphasis on her as unique to be heard is to be heard as unique

of thing before...isn't this	real interest
intriguing...this person has	in her
really got something!"	
Not that this is a textbook case!	she isn't a case

The next step I took was to write a summary of each dialogue, drawing out all those distinctions which were of importance for that particular participant. I have not included those summaries here, but they helped me to solidify in my own mind those distinctions which made each dialogue a unique and unrepeatable event of understanding. To have included them here would have made this story impractically long I thought, and in the end, the story which I wished to tell had more to do with the common voice which I heard.

The next step for me in this process was to bring all of the dialogues together as a single text, as a common voice addressing a common question: "What happens in therapy which makes a difference?" I did not want to end with the individual summaries of the dialogues. While they convey the unending diversity of the therapy experience, how it never exactly repeats itself as it conforms to the demands of each unique coupling, I felt that more could be said. The point for me in this step was not to obliterate the differences between the individual dialogues, but to bring them together in a way which would highlight how those differences might be understood as variations of a common theme. So, among the individual voices, each with its own unique tone and quality, there were some common songs--and it is these which this next section brings forth. These "common themes" reflect my understanding of the dialogues as I stand outside all of them and describe what begins to emerge and cohere as the distinctions of differences which really matter in all psychotherapy (or at least in all eight of these psychotherapy experiences). I used the same procedure at this level as I had in the previous one: That is, I brought the individual statements together as variations of a larger, unifying, common theme. Where it happened that participants varied in their experience, I have tried to draw this out as well. The reader will note early that it is tempting to try to keep each participant's experience separate, to paint a picture of each person as she or he is made known through the dialogue, to keep track of who said what, and to wonder over such issues as whether "this is the person with the university education", and so on. I have deliberately avoided introducing each participant in such detail, so that little by little they become known to the reader, much as they became known to me, and so that it is the themes themselves which are highlighted through the speakers. What follows are those themes. They are the distinctions of the "differences which made a difference" for the participants.

First, I want to point out again that these themes are a co-creation, as all understanding is. They represent the bringing together of my own preunderstandings with those of the participants, and the creation of a consensual understanding which is neither mine, nor theirs, but "ours". Further, what these participants brought to language was not their understanding as it already existed before being put into words: The understanding itself emerged in and through our dialogues, in the words, in our interaction and quest for mutuality. This was a co-discovery as well as a co-creation.

The first half of this dissertation represents my attempt to trace the development of my own thinking. It is in essence a statement of my own preunderstandings which I brought to these dialogues, some of them in an only faintly articulated form, others more robustly grasped. It will not surprise the reader then that the themes which follow bear the stamp of my own thinking. I cannot apologize for that since it reflects the essence of hermeneutics. I have however, as I indicated earlier, worked hard to allow the voices of my participants to be heard through me, and I have tried to present the actual words of the participants as much as possible. Here, then, are the themes.....

5. The Themes

A. The Individuality of the Client

Without exception, the participants in this study described in one way or another how the therapy experience had allowed their wholeness and uniqueness as individuals to be brought forth, heard, understood, cared for, and preserved in dignity and respect. They felt respected as persons whose identity was defined by their wholeness as human beings capable of growth and change, not by their symptoms and problems. None of these people felt that they were ever treated as cases, clinical conditions, or even as "abnormal". They were **persons**, individuals. This theme of the individuality of their person was a distinction which appeared in many forms throughout the interviews.

Real interest in the client as a person

There was a sense for all these clients that the therapist was genuinely **interested** in them, that he was curious, intrigued, fascinated by them, that he wanted to meet them as real people with real life concerns, families, friends, hobbies, needs, goals. One of the most common words which appeared throughout all the dialogues was this single word "person", and along with it, descriptions of the therapist's interest. Joan for example, described how it came as a joyous surprise that the therapist took time to get to know her:

> "I had some pictures of one of my holidays, and he cared about seeing them. That was important. He wanted to know a little about me. It was like getting to know another person!"

Vi very poignantly described her joy:

> "I'm not sure that many of us feel that the me is heard. The real me. Does anyone hear me? They hear the words I'm saying. To have the feeling that someone is going beyond the simple words and going to the heart of what the person is, that's very healing."

In her therapy, she had felt heard as a person, and this was a distinctive experience for her. She spoke further:

> "I was so intrigued with what happened....what blew me away is that...I was the only one that counted in the session, and all I really wanted was someone to listen--that I didn't in turn have to listen to--that I could just talk, and they would be interested!...Someone to act like your life is interesting, and you don't have to socially return that gift".

For Vi this was such a powerful gift, to be the exclusive subject matter of dialogue, to have someone show interest in her life and problems, without there having to be any reciprocity. There is more in this than a narcissistic desire to be in centre stage: When heard in context, Vi's comments reveal a yearning to be regarded as special, as worthy of someone's interest and time. Later in our dialogue she spoke further about the therapist's keen interest in her:

> "He was fascinated, intrigued. Like "isn't this intriguing?...Aren't we learning a lot!" It was all fascinating, and good. Even the negatives were good."

Kate expressed surprise that the therapist was so sensitive to her need to be heard as a person, and so interested in everything she revealed. He made her feel:

> "that I was more than okay. I felt wonderful, that I was a good person, that I'm great....It was a revelation that I could be that way (be herself) and that everything would still be okay. He thought I was great, and I honestly knew beyond a doubt that he really thought I was great!"

Garth described his relief when, after being hastily diagnosed by his family doctor as chemically depressed, he found a therapist who actually spent time getting to know and understand him, and who expressed interest in how his problems made sense in terms of the rest of his life. He describes his pleasure at feeling understood:

> "The first appointment....I think I was there for an hour and a half, and it didn't seem that long. I never once got the impression that there was someone lined up outside the door, that there was someone waiting."

He was worth taking time to get to know! He ~~also~~ contrasted this successful therapy experience with another brief encounter with a psychologist:

> "When I first experienced all these problems I went to see a counsellor...but he wanted to see me again, and I went back in two weeks, and I felt then that he was worse off than I was... Like, he didn't know why I was there, he didn't remember anything I had talked to him about. He asked me these questions from a paper, an outline sort of....I thought after all we talked about--the desperation I felt!--and he didn't even remember who I was or why I was there. He was concerned about filling out my record!"

Joan described to me with real joy and enthusiasm what a wonderful feeling it was to her to find that a therapist was actually interested in what she had to say. This was a new experience in her life, to find someone who showed interest in her:

> "He listened to me. What I had to say was important to him! The other people in my life, for a while I haven't been able to relate to them...What I have to say didn't mean anything to them...But he made me feel that I was okay."

She found to her amazement, that she could talk about anything, and the therapist didn't interrupt her or cut her off:

> "I didn't talk about my activities with a lot of people, but I could sit there and talk to him (the therapist) about them, how they made me feel, what I enjoyed about them, my perceptions and observations..."

She always felt that he was interested, that she was worth getting to know.

Lars, who was sensitive to any kind of professionalism which smacked of arrogance, was amazed to discover that his therapist treated him like an equal, and really took time to listen to him:

> "He's a very easy person to talk to...You just automatically like the guy. Very honest individual...He asks you first, before he says anything. What I mean is, he talks to you, but he tries to find out first how things are going for you, how you're doing. You feel easy, and I could just sit and talk."

Similarly, Greg, who initially expected the therapy to be more like medical diagnosis and treatment, was surprised to learn that the therapist just wanted to talk with him and get to know him.

Care for the person of the client

For many of the participants, the "caring" of the therapist was a central motif which was explicitly distinguished as itself a healing force in the therapy. It seems that this was particularly so for the women, and also for Frank. In these dialogues it was often the very first major distinction which was made. Vi said very near the beginning: "I knew he was a deeply caring person, and if he was listening, he really was listening." This was essential to Vi: He could be trusted to preserve their encounter as one of genuine honesty between persons. She also said, "I knew he cared, but I didn't know how that caring would come out". Indeed, the word "care", or "caring", or "being cared for", though frequently used by most of the participants was, as it turned out, one of those words which had to be carefully examined for what it really meant. For Vi it had something to do with the honesty and integrity of the therapist as a person who could be trusted to be real. She talked later in our dialogue about the importance of the therapist's caring coming from his "centre", rather than being sort of slapped on as a peripheral professional technique. She had experienced that too in a previous therapy which had left her feeling demoralized and unimportant as a person.

This distinction of "real" caring was a frequently made one as well. Those participants who distinguished caring as a central theme in their therapy were also quick to point out that they could tell real caring from pretended caring, or from a simply professional courtesy. It was important from their point of view that I understood this: They were convinced that it had made a difference to them.

For some of the participants in this study it had come as a startling surprise that they were so instantly comfortable and at ease with their therapist, and this was a sign of the therapist's care for them, that he "set them instantly at ease". Janet, who had been used to impersonal treatment told me:

> "My first thought was how friendly and caring she seemed even though she didn't know me...how are you, come on in, have some coffee..."

She was received as a real person, much to her astonishment. This idea that the therapist **took care** to bring forth and preserve their "person" emerges in all the interviews I participated in. For some, like Frank, it seemed to emerge more centrally. He speaks here of his sense of being cared for, indeed loved, by his therapist:

> "It's extraordinarily hard to say what makes you know somebody loves you....being able to grasp where you are in a few words, and putting it all in a nutshell, and to make a joke, and to say 'well for me it's like this'....and to remember what you've said 5 weeks ago. That's not just technique. I think there's also love. And then I suppose little things like we might give each other a hug at the end of a session. Now a hug is not a professional piece of courtesy, it's also a genuine gesture."

This short passage reveals to me the tremendous importance of the therapist taking care to bring forth the unity of the client as a person rather than a case, and conveying that through insightful and meaningful feedback. It also speaks of the tremendous love of some therapists for their clients.

For Joan, being "cared for"--the simple fact that her therapist found her interesting and worthwhile knowing as a person--was itself the cornerstone of the therapy. It was the difference which really mattered to her. Being "cared for" meant that she really made a difference to the therapist, that her life mattered. She said:

> "Seeing him was knowing this person cared about me, and if I needed to I could phone him up. I was feeling lousy, and I knew he would not judge me".

It also meant:

> "I think better of myself and that began with him. He cared about me, so I started to care about me. He was really significant to me for a time period. He had faith in me that nobody else had. He believed in me without me asking him to. He felt that I had good qualities, that I was worthwhile getting to know, and he would tell me "you're one of my favourite clients!"

Her therapist thought she was special. "That made a big difference to me....that he appreciated me." So, for Joan, there was also a sense in which being cared for meant being liked and appreciated.

This was true also of Kate, who as we saw above, sensed that the therapist genuinely liked her, even those qualities which she herself was unsure about. He still thought she was great! Vi's therapist genuinely liked her as well. She spoke of the importance of him affirming her even when she didn't like herself:

> "There's so much that happens in finding out what we are, and how complex we are. It's intriguing. If we stumble over things that we think are negative, then it's pretty intimidating, and could be overwhelming. So I can see the need to have someone there to say "that's okay".

Frank expressed his sense of the therapist's care for him quite explicitly, as we saw, but he also expressed a sense of being "liked": "He does feel that affection, and even articulates it !" And such was also the case with Greg, who sensed that the therapist actually enjoyed his company to the extent that "If the day ever came about that we had to spend some time together doing something, I'm sure we'd get along just perfectly!"

Janet was amazed at how much her personal life mattered to the therapist, and how much of it the therapist was willing to be involved with:

> "She is more than just a psychologist. She has brought over baby clothes and now she's got some more for me, and she wants to come see us in the hospital".

And Frank again:

> "I like his constant care. I have quite frequently recently phoned him up, in a crisis, and he has been there! I like his treatment of people with respect."

This idea of being treated with "respect" came through repeatedly in these dialogues, and with it was the sense that there was great care to preserve the dignity of the client as a whole person, to refuse to reduce the client to a "client", to give them real ontological status as persons. I never got the feeling in my conversations with the participants that this care had been lightly bestowed--as a professional courtesy that is--or that it had been lightly received or abused. These clients did not think of the therapist as the buddy who does everything and whose shoulder is ever-present. They respected the context of the care and understood the greatness of the gift.

Some of the participants did not speak so explicitly of the therapist's "care", or it was not so much of a central theme. Greg for instance did not use the word "care" at all in our dialogue, but he did talk repeatedly about the "respect" of the therapist for him, the way the therapist affirmed his abilities and intelligence and progress, and the appreciation of him as a person. Garth, whose therapy had consisted of a lot of teaching (eg., relaxation, study skills), did not talk so much about the therapist's care for him, but it was clearly of importance, and he did say "She was concerned, she cared". He also added that without that caring he would not have been willing to even stay in the therapy. It was the precondition of all the rest: "If it wouldn't have been that way, I really don't think I would have got that much help!" For Garth, it was essential that the therapist care enough about him to really listen. That was the indication to him that it was "safe" to open up, to reveal himself honestly--and without that, the rest of the therapy (the teaching) could not have happened. So the caring of the therapist was the unquestionned backdrop of the therapy, but for Garth it never became the central motif in itself--as it did so clearly for some of the other participants.

Therapy of persons rather than cases

Repeatedly throughout these dialogues I listened to participants tell me that they never felt like a "case", or a "number", or a "problem", or even a "client". This was a distinction of major importance to every one of these people, and one that was defended with a great deal of emotional involvement by them. Listen for example to Lars, who had previously grown accustomed to a rather beaurocratic management of "his case":

> "to be treated like a human being rather than a number is really important. If you're treated like a number eventually you come to behave like one".

For all the participants there was the suggestion that it was not their "case" which the therapist wanted to know more about, but them. This was often explicitly articulated by the participants as "I was not a case to him" or "I never felt sick or abnormal". It was like the "given", the unquestionned backdrop of their whole therapy experience, without which it could not have hinged together. Several of them expressed bewilderment that I would even question this fundament of their experience. Garth had very clearly experienced the damaging effects of being treated "as a case" when he went to see his family doctor and was diagnosed with a depression beyond his control. He was clear in his mind that that was the exact opposite of this recent therapy experience, where, because he was a person rather than a case, his symptoms were automatically understandable, and hence even "normal".

To be seen as "normal"--or at least as "not sick"--was a recurrent distinction made by the participants of something that had really made a difference. Just as Garth was surprised that his therapist didn't panic when she heard about his symptoms, so was Lars. The fact that the therapist was not perturbed by his talk about suicide reassured him that it was alright to have such thoughts. Similarly, Kate's discovery that she could "be herself" without alienating the therapist was immensely affirming. She was not a "case" to him, but simply a person.

Joan spoke with great delight about the fact that in her therapy she felt so normal and stable because she was not a case. She said emphatically:

> "He never once gave me the impression that I had a problem. Never once did he say I had a problem!"

I think that for some of these participants there was a sense that their therapy experience might have been slightly unusual--that is, that for some reason, the therapist really didn't consider them as "clients", but perhaps more like "friends" (although as we will see later, this distinction of friendship needs to be clarified.) Joan said:

> "I can't put my finger on it, but you can meet a person and come away unaffected by it, and sometimes you feel you've added a little bit to their life."

Therapy as acceptance

To be "accepted" was another recurrent distinction which I hope to make clear. The distinction had to do with being received by the therapist for who they really were. It was associated with an abiding sense of acceptance for whatever might be revealed. It was associated with honesty and openness and genuineness--with a feeling of being free to simply "be". For Kate, for instance, it was absolutely central to her therapy that she be accepted for who she was, including all the "bad parts".

> "One of the key things is that he was totally unconditional, non-judgmental, so that even though I had done some things that would not be considered proper, and was feeling really awful, that was not an issue. The issue was that he accepted me for who I was!"

Later she added the following, which further conveys the importance of being affirmed for what is brought forth:

> "There's someone there who's listening, who's not being judgmental, who's being supportive, encouraging, who's saying it's okay...it's okay to feel this way, to think this way. It's not like there's anything wrong with you".

Compare this to Vi's experience:

> "And one BIG difference...which has made the difference for me...is a person who doesn't think I need to be cured or changed. He accepted me where I was.....His only goal was my healing, whatever it took to get there was fine with him. He was fascinated, intrigued, like isn't this intriguing? Aren't we learning a lot? It was all fascinating and good. Even the negatives were good. Everything was growth and blooming, and life took on a whole different hue because of that."

Greg pursued another distinction which even further highlights this idea of the wholeness of the client as a person whose problem was accpeted as an integral part of him:

> "No! He wasn't treating my condition. He was treating ME! Because if he was just treating my condition, he'd...you're just doing something to my condition, getting rid of it, killing it, like surgery, removal. No, it wasn't me doing surgery on myself. You can't turn yourself against yourself. If you fight yourself, you hurt yourself. You have to work with yourself."

Greg's wholeness as a person was brought forth in the therapy in such a way that he and his problem were one and the same, and he no longer had to fight against himself to overcome it. This respect for himself was found in the context of a therapy which respected him, his pace, and his resourcefulness in finding ways to grow.

Repeatedly throughout the interviews with the participants I listened to stories of how as clients these people had felt wonderfully respected as capable, resourceful persons in whom the therapist had obvious and apparently unwavering "faith". Repeatedly I heard comments like "he had faith in me, that I could do it!" This was not experienced by them as sloppy or indiscriminate praise, like "of course you can do it!"--the kind of "line" that would be said to just anyone. It was not a technique, but real faith in them. The sense I had as I listened to these comments was that this also helped set the context of the therapy for them, that the therapist was not about to "dispense" the cure--that the path was to be found within themselves.

Therapy as the bringing forth of uniqueness

This idea is closely tied to several others. While these people felt that they had been met as whole persons (rather than as cases, or clients), they also felt that they had been acknowledged for their uniqueness as persons. I think this is an added distinction which is not entirely conveyed by the others. They were called forth first of all as persons rather than cases, but secondly, as complex persons with unique characteristics, goals, needs, interests. Vi described:

> "I never felt with him that there was anyone else like me, and I like to believe that I'm very unique and maybe that's part of the feeling that he's really listening".

This sense of being treated as unique was frequently conveyed to me in statements about the therapist being uninterested in labels or diagnoses. Many participants felt that the therapist's questions were aimed at simply getting to know them better, at inviting them to reveal more about themselves, not at forming opinions or pigeon-holes for them to fit into. Vi speaks again:

> "there were no judgment calls. He didn't analyse me....I could almost see him thinking...I've never heard this kind of thing before. Isn't this intriguing...this person has really got something here...NOT that this is a textbook case!"

It was enormously important to Vi not to be pre-judged or seen in terms of static pigeon-holes. She described a previous, unhelpful therapy experience:

> "He recognized me as an individual, but decided that that's all there was to me...'now I've pegged her, and everything I see from now on will come

> through those "preconceived ideas". So, initially he seemed to be able to accept me as an individual but after a while he couldn't accept me as a dynamic individual, and couldn't appreciate that there were so many aspects of me".

Lars hinted at a similar idea:

> "It's not that he just asks me questions. We just sit down and talk together. Questions do come up, but it isn't just a case of asking questions".

Here we can catch a sense that the therapist was not driving for any particular label or diagnosis, but simply, as Lars put it, "chatting together". "There was nothing that he tried to analyse. He was interested in ME!" This therapist was interested in his unique problem, not in how it was the same as everyone else's.

Of course, as we already saw, one of the most significant features of Garth's therapy experience was the absence of labelling him as sick, and the concentrated attention paid to him and his unique set of circumstances. And for Kate what she perceived as the totally non-judgmental attitude of her therapist towards her problems was the unmistakeable highlight of the experience. It was the willingness to really listen and hear the uniqueness of their stories, without preconceived categories to fit them into or judgements about their "goodness or badness", "sickness or health", which was so liberating and affirming for all of these participants. Not one of these people wanted to be labelled or diagnosed. Not one wanted to hear how their problem was the same as someone else's. This was definitely NOT the kind of understanding they had in mind when they went for therapy. They wanted to be heard in their uniqueness, and without exception that is what they got. They wanted to be allowed to be simply who they were, and as we will see later they also wanted to be allowed to grow and change in conformity to their own path of uniqueness, not according to some predetermined path of the therapist's.

I heard many times from the participants that the therapist did not seem interested in curing them or changing them. The problem did not seem to have become a specific entity wrenched from the background of the client's whole life. It seemed to have become a more diffused matter for many of them--not a problem to be fixed, but a life to be examined and put in order, a direction to be found. This too I think is a reflection of the individuality with which each of these people was received. Their problems were unique, just as they were. In fact, many of them spoke in one way or another about their sense that the problem was themselves.

Greg was quite dumbfounded by the tremendous respect his therapist showed for his uniqueness, for his unique sense of pacing as an individual, and for his own resources for making sense of his life:

> "Well, that was the nicest thing I ever heard, for somebody to say 'take your own time' when everyone else was always pushing me. Awful nice! Someone finally giving me some respect!"

In Greg's case the therapist made no instant interpretations of his problem, and offered little by way of specific advice--just the continual affirmation of his individual pace for learning and growth. This respect for his individuality was, in Greg's mind, the major catalyst for his improvement.

B. The Individuality of the Therapist

The therapist as a person

The participants varied in the length to which they talked to me about the person of the therapist, and specific descriptions varied, but without exception every one spoke of the therapist as a real person who was present in the therapy as more than a detached, clinical observer. Some mentioned this rather casually, as if it was an unexpected gift of the therapy to have met such an interesting, warm, and human person. Others talked about it at length as the very substance of the therapy, but there was no doubt that for everyone the distinction of the real personhood of the therapist was a fundamental one, just as the distinction of themselves as being persons, not cases, was fundamental. I listened repeatedly to expressions of surprise and delight at how friendly, humble and unassuming the therapists had been, and how respectful, kind, and gentle the interactions had been. The most frequent words used to describe the therapists were "friend" and "equal". These therapists were definitely more like friends than like authorities.

As we saw above, Janet's therapist was very much interested in being present for her even outside the therapy hours after her baby arrived, and Janet thought of her as "more than just a psychologist".

This was someone who was willing to risk making contact with her and her life outside the office. Janet tended to think of her as "an older, more knowledgeable sister", not as an authority. This was a crucial distinction for Janet, who had experienced the coldness and distance that can sometimes be present in a therapeutic relationship. She told me:

> "It didn't take long (for her to know that this would be different). That's just the kind of person she is. I'm good at being able to tell if a person is being genuine or not, and I guess that's why I felt so comfortable with her."

Several other therapists were willing to be available at any time of crisis, and gave out home phone numbers. For Joan, this availability spoke to her about how important she was, and was central to her recovery. Knowing that she could call him any time (which she didn't actually do) was a source of great security to her in a time of personal upheaval.

The availability of the therapist was not a major distinction for all the participants, but the humanness and friendliness certainly were. For Greg for instance, the reality of the person of the therapist seemed to be an intriguing oddity which absolutely delighted him. He described the therapist as :

> "friendly, intelligent, not boastful, a good person... the kind of guy you could tell a bad joke to and he'd laugh. The kind of guy I'd want to be friends with. We had a professional kind of relationship too, but if the day ever came about that we had to spend some time together doing something, I'm sure we'd get along just

perfectly."

Greg was amazed that "he talked to me in terms that I would understand, that made sense to me, that related to me", that this person with so much training and experience was afterall

> "exactly like a friend...You know how two friends talk. If we're talking about something I know more about than you, then I'd be the informed person...It was like that."

And so even for Greg, who didn't dwell on the person of the therapist as an essential part of his own healing process (as for instance, Joan did), there emerged a clear sense of gratitude for the encounter, as he indicated when he told me a story of the therapist visiting him in hospital following some surgery. "He even came to visit me! He just showed up one day!"

Even Garth, whose therapy has consisted of more direct teaching than any of the others, was impressed by the warmth and friendliness of the therapist who made the techniques real for him by demonstrating them, telling him how she had used them in her own life, and taking the time to be sure he really understood. Her personal touch gave him the confidence that he could really do it!

Lars, who of all the participants was the one who most thought of the therapist as someone to be treated with respect (He always insisted for example on calling the therapist Dr.), was also one who was most insistent on the importance of being treated as an equal, and who talked about the therapist having to meet him on even terms. He was amazed that his therapist was in fact so friendly and easy to talk to. "We were on equal terms!" he told me several times. "I was never just a case!" And of course, the counterpart to that was that the therapist was never "just a therapist".

> "I find him a great man to talk to. I can sit and be easy with him."

This, and many similar quotes from other participants in this study, repeatedly pointed to therapeutic encounters where the therapist engaged in a relaxed, easy, informal and personal exchange with the client. For some of them, this actually proved to be instrumental to their recovery. Joan was one of these, and her experience as she describes it is fairly representative of the many similar comments others made. She described an incident to me where she had had the opportunity to ask her therapist a rather clinical question (about a topic in her psychology course), and where she suddenly had a sense of the breadth of his knowledge and experience:

> "It wasn't until last September that I actually started seeing him as a doctor. I don't want to minimize him at all, but it was like we're sitting here, and we're chatting...like good friends".

Later she added "He related to me as a person, not as a doctor, and he made me feel okay by doing that". She was worthy of being a person! And he risked being more than just a therapist.

> "Never did he ever give the impression that he had all this education behind him and that he could spout off all these terms!"

In fact, his willingness to relate to her in a more personal way, and to avoid any psychological jargon, really contributed to her feeling that she was "okay afterall". His personality was quite real to her, and important. He was humble, calm, caring and sensitive--all qualities which astounded her in a man. He shared some personal anecdotes from his own past, and some information about his hobbies and interests. He was anything but a colourless, faceless clinician! And the effect of all this was:

> "One of his biggest influences on me was that he was a man who cared, and I could relate to him as a person. It was a little different from friendship. There was friendship there, but we both knew our places. I was the person coming for help, and he was the person helping me. But the friendship factor is still a factor, and I wouldn't hesitate to call him a friend. I wouldn't ask him out for lunch...it's a limited friendship, but I know that if I had to phone him up he'd be there for me."

The fact that Joan's therapist shared something of himself with her--that he let himself be known--was significant for her in another way. She was impressed by his strength and integrity, and felt that this had given a firm backdrop against which her own personality then began to take shape.

For Kate as well the person of the therapist was an important distinction: He was definitely more than a disinterested observer, and he occasionally shared stories with her about some of his own discoveries in life. It was a warm and hearty relationship with the sharing of laughter as well as tears. When it was over--when she was "well"--there was a great sadness for her at the sudden and unnatural ending of what had become such a strong attachment. She wanted to know him more as a friend, and sensed that under other circumstances they would indeed have been good friends. She gave him one of her own pieces of art: a symbol I think of the fuller mutuality which might have been, and which still might be. It was interesting too that while this aspect of the therapy was undoubtedly important to Kate, there was no doubt either that once the work was done, and she was well, he did not hold on. She told me that he once said to her "When you get well, I'm getting the hell out of your way!" And so he did. That too was important for Kate. So there truly was not the same kind of mutuality in this relationship as in ordinary friendship. There was a context "this is therapy" which it seems for many participants defined this as a different kind of friendship (more about that later).

Joan made another powerful distinction about the personal presence of the therapist. She always felt that behind and through whatever advice or suggestions he gave "the person that he was came through". She said "He's very integrated... He and his profession are very much the same thing". Again, it was his person which she heard, and even when she sometimes disagreed with him (as she did when she encountered some of his religious beliefs), she appreciated him even more for risking being present for her. As she so eloquently put it:

> "It was his viewpoint...that was the personal aspect of him...that was good! Because it bridges the gap".

It **bridged** the gap! It made him present and real. It gave him a substance, a soul with which to bridge the silence between them. He was not a silent sponge, soaking up her words but revealing nothing. He was not a faceless mirror, reflecting only her. He was himself. And so there was some hope for real dialogue. She said:

> "He always respected what I had to say. Our viewpoint might be different, but it didn't affect the working relationship."

Frank was equally grateful for the presence of the therapist as "a real person with struggles visible, problems that are visible", who was willing to meet him and pay attention to him as a friend.

> "He can be there in his difference. Very much there in his difference. And me being there in my difference, my **centre**. Now, the centres can be touching".

Again, there is the idea that this is no superficial clinical relationship between an objective observer and a clinical problem. The "difference" of the therapist is not a problem to be overcome, but something to be appreciated, if not the very essence of the therapy. Frank had the sense that the therapist was very firmly centred and that that centred-ness called to him, to what was central in him, to take shape and grow. While this is all very metaphorical it does convey a distinctive component of Frank's experience (and, I think several of the others in the study): That is, that dialogue is **between** people who are fully present, and that dialogue is the road to self-discovery and self-determination.

For Frank the therapist's theoretical orientation and battery of techniques were helpful, but only in that they formed a frame--a frame through which the person of the therapist could draw him closer to his own "ultimate reality" (or path of self-determination). In a somewhat lengthy series of quotes which I think nevertheless must be heard, he sums this up beautifully:

> "He's there as himself, with his faults and his problems, and he's there for you. And he's there with certain skills which he has made his own, and we're also there with a certain subject matter which is my life...and the work is about what to do with my life...or who am I...Of course his own personal problems and life don't impinge very much in the relationship...It is different from a friendship outside, but it's not completely polarized. In a friendship outside the subject is certainly not just your life...it's more both your lives."
> "No matter what orientation he had, using this technique, any technique, they're all valuable, but there needs to be someone there"
> "the ideas are just the frame. It's the person inside the frame that matters."

For Frank, the most important distinction--the thing which had really made a difference to him, was the person of the therapist, the full, living, presence of someone who was willing to touch him and struggle with him.

For Frank and Kate and Joan there was some sense that the therapeutic encounter had been mutually appreciated, that there had been some small measure of reciprocity, that they had added something to the therapist's life, even if only the sense of being appreciated. Even Vi, who raved about the fact that the relationship was one where she did not have to feel obliged to reciprocate, but could talk exclusively about herself, speculated about how the encounter might have "built up" the therapist as well. My sense is that these people felt that they had really made a difference to the therapist, that the therapist too had been transformed. This I think speaks of the extent to which these therapists really risked being present as persons in the therapy.

The therapist's expertise

Of all the distinctions which these participants made, this one was the most befuddling, the most ambiguous, and the one which generated the most ambivalence and uncertainty. It is a distinction therefore which needs to be drawn very carefully here.

First of all, for all of the participants the specific techniques or suggestions which the therapist had made, had really made a difference. For example, being taught how to relax, how to study, and how to make better use of his time, had totally reoriented Garth to what he could do to regain control of what had previously been a hopeless situation. For Frank there had been similar suggestions--how to control his breathing, how to play with a headache--which had been helpful. For Janet there was relaxing in the face of her symptoms, and learning to take them in stride. For Kate there were little "tricks" she used to play with distressing situations and turn them around. For Lars there were concrete demonstrations like "you're stewing over an exam deadline which you may have missed...here; do something about it instead...call them...here, I'm dialing the number for you...talk to them!"

The exact suggestions of course varied, and there was no shortage of them. All of the participants valued these suggestions, and valued the interaction and the dialogue upon which the suggestions were built. They did not always follow them, but they valued them nevertheless, and often found them very helpful. Garth, who was the one participant whose therapy was most teaching oriented, was the most appreciative of all the techniques he learned: They were the tools with which he regained control of his life.

Moreover, many of them explicitly valued the fact that the therapist was a "trained professional", and stated that this was an important difference between ordinary friendship and therapy. This distinction of the therapist as an "expert" seemed to matter to the extent that they wanted something more than what ordinary friendship could provide them, but it was enormously difficult for the participants to identify how the therapist's expertise--this "something more"-- had been demonstrated in the therapy. No one for instance, ever felt "techniqued" or manipulated in any way, or experienced the therapist's expertise and knowledge as "the truth", as authoritative, intrusive or foreign. In fact, all of these people felt distinctly that the therapist had simply been himself. The previous distinction of the therapist as a person, as a friend and equal, is testimony to that. But still there was this distinction of the therapist as a trained professional--or "wizard" as Kate put it--which seemed to appear as well. So, this was friendship with a difference of some sort. This is where the ambiguity arose.

Perhaps Kate can introduce some sense of the difficulty:

> "I had faith that he was the right person to help me. Mind you, there might have been someone else who could help me, but I sort of thought of him as a wizard."

She clearly wanted to talk to someone who could offer something different, and this came out again later:

> "Just talking isn't enough. It's more a matter of talking to the right person...If you're going to talk to somebody it's got to be somebody good .....like it just doesn't do to go talk to the hairdresser...You have to see somebody who's wiser than you, who can lead you, facilitate but not to the point of dragging you the way their beliefs are, but to letting you find your own way."

This "difference" which she thought her therapist had to offer was hard to pin down though. She did not want to be "dragged" his way, she did not want him to give her all the answers. She said:

> "I knew he couldn't give me the answer. I didn't know the answer! How could anyone else know the answer? But I knew that I would learn something, that there would be some growth...and to me, that's what he was there for ....to help **me** figure it out."

The emphasis in this last phrase was clearly on **her** figuring it out. She felt that she needed to talk, and that in talking and hearing herself talk, she would figure things out for herself. When I asked her if she really needed a therapist to listen to her while she did this, she answered yes.

> "There has got to be some interaction! But it has to be non-judgmental, accepting, open. Otherwise, why go see somebody....if they're just going to try to put their beliefs on you!"

So, clearly, she didn't want his beliefs, but she did still want some interaction. But interaction with friends would not have been the same. She wanted interaction with someone "wiser" than her, but she did not want him to impose that wisdom on her! Here we have some sense of the ambivalence and ambiguity which so pervaded all my conversations with the participants when it came to this theme.

Vi spoke clearly about the importance of feeling like she was the expert on her problem, not the therapist, and yet she too, clearly valued the therapist's "expertise" in psychology. For her it meant:

> "by taking time out of your life to study for a certain number of years, the person coming to you feels that you know more about the general subject--not more about me--but more about the subject psychology. And when it gets right down to it, it allows the person to put a certain amount of confidence in that individual."

However, she did not want the therapist's expertise if it meant that she would be labelled, or that her uniqueness as an individual would be lost. As we saw, her sense that she was valued as unique and fascinating was a cornerstone of the therapy. She speaks again:

> "I think that if you constantly include in the training this sense of the uniqueness

> of the individual, the awe, humbleness...like if we look at the fullness of what is similar, and how varied the similarities are....the fascination the intrigue and adoration at how complex we are in our similarities, and yet each one takes those and becomes unique with it.....Then, maybe if that's kept in, then the compassion, the sense of "let's find out what's going on within" could be kept within the training. But if that's kept out, the training will lead to a sense of judgment. It can go either way."

So, the training--or "expertise"--of the therapist can be either an enhancement or an impediment to the flowering of the unique in every therapeutic encounter. But for Vi, and for the other participants in these dialogues, the therapist's expertise was always an "enhancement", never an impediment.

Joan speaks of her experience:

> "The funny thing about this is that in my psychology course there was one portion called client-centred therapy in there, and I thought Hey maybe this is what he and I were doing, but I never even after reading it felt like I was the client....I never felt he was using techniques. If I had, I wouldn't have gone back to him...He and his profession are very much the same thing."

So for Joan it was essential that the therapist and the techniques are "one", and inseparable. He was not "using techniques" on her, but being himself. And yet Joan also said that it was important for her to see a trained therapist rather than a friend because:

> "I didn't have confidence in myself or in the people around me to say that I was okay."

But she did have confidence in the therapist, that if he said she was okay, she was! This affirmation was an important gift of the therapy. The therapist was there for her as a friend but also as a friend with expertise--although she did not want the expertise to be used authoritatively or dogmatically in the sessions.

Greg, after telling me that the therapist was "exactly like a friend", said this:

> "He was professional yet human. He looks like a professional, but he's still a person you can talk to....friendly and personal....It would not have been as helpful just talking to a friend, because there's a safety factor there that he's a professional, that he knows what he's doing."

But then he immediately added:

> "As unorthodox as it might seem for this guy who's supposed to have gone to school for all those years--a doctor!--to tell me very simple things! He didn't really tell me anything like I was expecting.....I don't know what they train you guys for...probably just to listen... but I don't even know about that....The thought had crossed my mind that there's this safety factor...seeing a trained doctor."

Greg was truly amazed that the expertise of the therapist was so invisible to him, that the therapy consisted of such simple advice. Again though, there is that "safety factor" which Joan alluded to as well, and Kate.

There was also a recurring emphasis in the interviews on the therapist's techniques and suggestions arising naturally from the unique personal encounter, from the dialogue, in a way which "fit", rather than arbitrarily from a pre-fixed theoretical position. When I questionned the participants about suggestions from the therapist there was never any sense that their own realities were being intruded upon or violated. Even when the suggestions were rejected there was no sense of violation. The participants felt free to accept what "fit", and reject what didn't. It seemed that the value of the therapist's suggestions was often a function of how they reflected the therapists's concern and willingness to get involved with them, not whether they were always "correct". Greg talked about how the therapist had relied on him for information about his problem and what he was discovering about himself, and how the suggestions just naturally came out of that information. Similarly, Joan talked about giving her therapist "all the pieces", and how he tried to arrange them into "something of substance". Frank talked about the therapist's suggestions arising from his understanding of his unique situation, not from any objective body of knowledge: It was knowledge of him which counted.

Frank talked about the therapist's techniques as methods for "getting in touch with his own (ie., the therapist's) reality", and I think this is a lovely distinction which deserves clarification. The therapist's techniques arose from the therapist's reality, but they are not imposed on Frank: They were more like an invitation to dance, to dialogue. They were helpful, but only to the extent that they "bridged the gap" as Joan put it. They gave structure to the sessions, but any structure would have been equally good, at least according to Frank. For Frank, and for the others, the most important thing was not the specific expertise of the therapist, but the person of the therapist himself, "present" in his uniqueness, with his techniques "which he makes his own".

> "The ideas are just the frame. It's the person
> inside the frame that matters."

The overwhelming sense of these people, as I outlined above under "the therapist as a person", was that these therapists had brought themselves forth as real persons in the encounter, that they participated as persons, not as distanced, "objective", uninvolved observers or bearers of the authoritative cure. Certainly for all, the person "inside the frame" mattered, but none of these people said that the ideas, or techniques, or suggestions of the therapist were unimportant. They were necessary, and unavoidably present (in some therapy experience, such as Garth's, far more than others) as the frame which gave structure to the encounter, which brought the therapist forth in the encounter as a person "with a difference". These participants wanted interaction with the therapist, not silence. And they wanted interactions which they did not find outside therapy in their day-to-day relationships. The therapist's ideas, techniques, and theories, were as much a defining feature of his presence and uniqueness in the encounter, as the clients' problems, interests, goals, resources, and potential for growth were the defining features of their individuality and personhood.

C. The Meeting

Therapy as Ritual

Frank was the only participant who explicitly talked about therapy as a "ritual". However, his sense that "there is possibly the ritual context which made a difference" seems to represent the experience of the other participants, even though they did not articulate it as such. All of the participants said that there was an added benefit in the therapeutic relationship which they could not get in an ordinary relationship. All of them said that talking to a friend would not have been as helpful.

The fact however that so many of these participants talked about their therapist in precisely those terms--as a friend--made this was a very difficult distinction to work out. The therapist was clearly very much a friend and equal, but they also felt that there was some added difference, something which went beyond ordinary friendship. It wasn't the therapist's body of knowledge per se, or any particular expertise which was displayed in the sessions. As we saw, most of them denied the obvious use of technique, and none of them ever felt they were in the presence of "an authority". The distinction seemed to have to do not with the chacteristics of the therapist at all, but with the nature of the relationship, with its specific definition as a ritualized encounter where the work to be done and the goals to be reached were different than in ordinary friendship. Thus, as Frank and Vi put it, the subject matter was always themselves, and the work to be done was the working out of their problems, and the therapist's problems did not enter: The reciprocity was limited. This was hinted at by other participants as well. Lars for instance was very clear that he needed to talk to a "professional", that he would never talk to his wife or his friends about the same matters. The same was true with Joan, who wanted to talk to a professional because it lent a legitimacy to the work (the talking) which otherwise would not have been there. For Kate, there was a certain "magic" in seeing a therapist: He was her "wizard". For Greg there was some comfort in seeing someone who "is supposed to know". For all of these participants I think what is being hinted at is that the context "this is therapy" is essential. This called the relationship forth in a particular way which gave it a subject matter and a goal which ordinary friendships lack. For all of them it allowed them to place some "faith" in the process as a process leading to change.

The creation of understanding "between"

This is another difficult distinction to draw because of the inadequacies of our present vocabulary, but many of the participants in his study spoke about a sense of 'we-ness' developing throughout their therapy. That is, there was a sense, variously expressed, of a world "between" which was neither the client's nor the therapist's, but rather some common ground or meeting place which they created together. Vi was the most explicit in this regard, but I think many of the comments of other participants hinge on a similar experience, which she described this way:

> "It's like in marriage. It's like it's a separate entity. To me, a good marriage is when both partners are trying to help that third entity grow and develop, and maybe the therapist-patient relationship feeds into that third entity, and builds that. Not that we're building up the therapist, or the client, that I'm building the other...and then I guess that has to build the participants. It does in marriage."

Compare this as well to Frank's sense of "ultimate realities" or "centres" touching and "calling out" to one another:

> ""He is very centred, and there isn't much that's going to disturb that centre. And that centre opens out, calls to whatever is central inside of me, and allows it to take shape."

Also,

> "He provides a sort of passage to ultimate reality."

And,

> "He can be there is his difference....And me being there in my difference, my centre. Now, the centres can be touching."

Finally,

> "The techniques are all a way of getting in touch with his (the therapist's) ultimate reality, which also means getting in touch with mine."

There is a sense here, undergirding these various passages, of that "we-ness" which Vi alluded to. Again, the idea tends to get a bit lost in our present vocabulary, but regardless of the words used, the overriding sense in many of these interviews was that something new arose from the meeting between therapist and client, from their unique interaction and dialogue.

Greg drew a lovely distinction about the uniqueness of his interaction with the therapist:

> "it's a process between two people, two individuals. And as soon as you take one out and put another one in, its a totally different process."

As we saw earlier, this was a crucial distinction for many of the participants, that they were not cases, that they were unique persons with unique problems.

Greg's description of the encounter itself as unique reveals a further distinction of importance. It was from this common ground between them that the therapist's specific techniques, ideas and suggestions arose. This is why, I think, they were so rarely experienced as foreign or intrusive. Frank, for example, insisted that the therapist's advice arose:

> "from his understanding of me, and his openness and receptiveness to me."

All of the participants expressed a sense of the therapy as a collaborative, cooperative, or team effort. There were frequent phrases like Lars' "we sat down together and talked, and we worked it out together", or Garth's "It was a goal for both of us to see me through this", or Frank's image of he and the therapist meeting together with himself as the common subject matter. Lars speaks again:

> "It's not so much a case of my giving him my problems to solve, as just being able to talk about it, get it out rather than keeping it in. ...Then by the end of the session, between the two of us, we've got it straightened out."

Always, as this passage suggests, there was a comfortable sense of cooperation which emerged as the ground upon which the therapy was built. There was also a sense that a common language emerged between therapist and client--not a technical language, but a real, human one. Listen to Joan:

> "I never felt that there were differences in education. There were, obviously, but I wasn't aware of that."

And,

> "I could talk to him about anything. His conversation wasn't way over my head."

Finally,

> "It wasn't like you're going to someone and pouring everything on the table and they're examining it. It wasn't like an examination. It was a sharing."

Greg's experience was similar:

> "He sort of met me half way and spoke to me in a way that I understood, that made sense to me, that related to me, which made it easy for me.....He never came across with a bunch of technical garbage that I couldn't understand."

All of the participants spoke either explicitly or implicitly about the process of talking as a process of discovery between them and the therapist. It was as if talking was a finding of words in which the problem suddenly came to stand. This is what was meant I think by the problem being worked out between them rather than beforehand. There were as Kate and Vi said, no "preset answers". There was in fact no preset problem either. Joan speaks:

> "In order to find my own answers I had to find out what was inside, to get it all out, and to have them listen to what was inside."

Compare this to Kate:

> "I think maybe when you talk it out you hear yourself say it and admit something...I needed to say what I had discovered."

And Frank:

> "I think it's like "getting in touch" with parts of me that have not been opened before or not been allowed to express themselves."

And finally Janet:

> "If you tell somebody something about yourself and they take you seriously, you're more inclined to say more, and maybe even to realize more things that you've kept inside all your life that you don't even know about....they come out that way."

There is a marvelous sense here of the problem coming to stand in the words with which it is brought to expression, a sense of discovery and even of surprise for what emerges in the process. Truly something is coming to creation in language. The problem comes to understanding through dialogue with someone who listens and does not prejudge.

All of the participants talked in one way or another about the benefit of having the therapist's "perspective" on the problem, but there was always the sense that the therapist's perspective was the view from the other side of the problem which had been brought forth cooperatively in the first place. That is, it was not an alien perspective on a redefined problem. The problem was already worked out between them, and the therapist simply gave his view from his angle on it. Greg for instance talked about the therapist relying on him for information:

> "He said 'you'll figure things out'. He said 'you already have in certain ways'. Over the times I saw him he'd say 'well, have you figured out anything new this week?' He asked me last time if I'd learned anything, if I was keeping track. And I found out that I had to go to a job I liked!"

And,

> "So, he'd make me think, away from the line I was going in. He gave me another point of view...in a different light."

Compare this to Kate's experience, which she described this way:

> "He could see better than I could see. I couldn't see the forest for the trees, and he had a clearer view of things because it wasn't his problem, and he was so sensitive."

She went on to describe his sensitivity to her problem, and his ability to see it from her side too.

All of these participants really felt that the therapist had made an effort to go beyond or behind their words to understand the real essence of their experience. Joan described it this way:

> "The people in my life...for a while I haven't been able to relate to them. They haven't been able to understand what I have to say. Or what I have to say didn't mean anything to them, like it wasn't reinforced....but the therapist listened to

> me. What I had to say was important--important to him!...What I had to say did make sense!"

Compare this to Vi's experience:

> "To have the feeling...that someone is going beyond the simple words, and going to the heart of what the person is, that's very healing."

For both of these participants, the words they spoke were more than "information" about their problem: They were a revelation of their very selves. It was **this** which the therapist seemed to understand, and he received their words with care. They felt that their words "made a difference" to the therapist, that they were more than meaningless monologue, there was a real attempt to establish **dialogue** with them, to receive and grasp their "otherness" not as something to be manipulated or annihilated but as something to be affirmed and strengthened. There is also a sense here, and in many of the interviews, that talking ("getting it all out" as so many of them put it) was more than a narcissistic talking just for the sake of hearing oneself talk. "There has to be some interaction", Kate said, echoing the words of the others. While I heard repeatedly that talking--"just" talking--had been an enormous release, the words had to be **heard**. It was not enough just to **say** them. Repeatedly I heard that talking out loud to oneself, writing in a diary, praying aloud, while useful in their own right, were no substitute for the talking that was done in therapy. The words had to meet someone. Kate speaks:

> "I've done a lot of thinking, and talking to myself, but it wasn't getting me where I needed to go....When you tell somebody else then you come to terms with 'yes, this is a problem', and I guess you need to engage that other person in your concern."

Repeatedly I heard from the participants that they had felt, as Vi put it, "listened to, not techniqued". Again, there is the sense of the therapist not rushing in with techniques for quick repairs, and a lovely sense of respect for the client's need to simply be heard, and for their world to be understood. It is this which laid the foundation of trust in therapy. Vi speaks again:

> "I knew he was a very deeply caring person, and if he was listening, he was listening!"

While all of the participants commented on the therapist's respect for and interest in their worlds, there were also occasional more specific comments (by Vi, Kate, and Joan) about the importance of the therapist respecting specific beliefs and working with them rather than trying to change them. To feel understood, these women needed to see that their specific beliefs were respected. For Kate this became an issue as she describes:

> "There was another time I told him about going to the chiropractor, and I sort of got the impression, not that he really said anything, that this was hocus pocus. But it didn't matter. He respected my belief in it, and we even used some 'touch for health' things!"

Similarly, Vi felt affirmed in her therapy experience because she and her therapist shared certain beliefs:

> "I knew he understood what I meant when I said I

> prayed for instance. He wasn't going to rephrase that and say 'you talk to yourself'".

She had had a previous therapy experience where

> "I went to another counsellor who I thought shared my belief system. There were lots of similar words but a different interpretation, so we found ourselves struggling".

Similar words but different experiences! What I wish to highlight here is the distinction which all of the participants expressed in some form, and which has run as a recurrent thread throughout all of this "results" section, which is that the therapy experience was an experience of being **heard and understood**, of speaking a common language which reveals a world of shared meanings and importance. The idea, expressed variously as the need to "engage the therapist" in one's concerns, the need for interaction or for feedback, the need to feel that one's words are important to another and make a difference, being spoken to in a personal, non-technical language which makes sense, all convey aspects of this important thread. It is the importance of **being understood**, of being able to work out some common ground of understanding, and to some extent a shared language and belief system.

The environment of love

Not everyone in this study spoke of feeling "loved", and few spoke quite that explicitly about it at all. Frank talked effortlessly and unashamedly of it while the others hinted more vaguely or used words like they felt "cared for" or "respected" or "affirmed". The experience I am hoping to distinguish more clearly here has little to do with whether those exact words were even used. The experience of being brought forth in an encounter as a unique person, of being respected and allowed to be present as a real "other" without interference or violation of that otherness, and without becoming simply the "object" of another's analysis, or manipulation is, in my vocabulary, an experience of **love**, and this experience was common to all who participated in this study.

All of the participants felt like the relationship with the therapist was one of "equals", and I think this is a powerful witness to what I have called the environment of love. There was never any hint of therapy being a relationship where power or violence played any part. Even Lars, who of all the participants was the one who wanted most to believe in the "expertness" of the therapist had this to say:

> "We were on equal terms! Once you get it into your head they can help you, then I think, let them be a little 'higher' because pretty soon you're going to catch up with them....You let them lead until you're on the right train again, then you catch up to them again. Then you're on equal terms and you can start playing with him!"

Even here we catch a sense of Lars "letting" the therapist be in a superior position. It is clearly not a matter of the therapist trying to dominate him. In fact, there is a sense here that the whole matter of roles is one of playful alternation.

These participants all talked, as we have discovered repeatedly above, of the respect they felt in therapy. The distinction which I want to add here has to do with their experience of growth in therapy, of what it was like to be changing, and how the environment of love, as I have described it, became the medium for that change.

All of the participants talked about their improvement in therapy as **their** process of growth, not the therapist's. Perhaps this is a distinction too obvious to be drawn, but it was my feeling that to these participants it was of monumental importance. For Greg, the journey was one of **his** learning and discovery. Repeatedly in good humour he told me that "the therapist didn't do anything!", that he was told he could "figure it out on his own". And, indeed he did! He would return to the therapy session, armed with his own discoveries which he then shared with the therapist. Frank made an interesting distinction about the therapy being a "context" provided by the therapist, where ideas could be suggested, and the therapist could then admire the work of the client.

For Vi, it was essential that she was "ready" for change, and it was her "readiness" which determined the success of treatment: The therapist didn't **make** her change. As she described it further:

> "I guess he listened while I learned, in the same sort of way a teacher sets up the environment that removes the barriers to learning, but doesn't learn for you. I felt that's what he was doing....Somebody planted, somebody watered, but it's the individual who does the growing."

Similarly, Frank described to me his difficulty in precisely identifying which changes in his life were or were not the result of therapy: The therapy itself was part of the choices of his life, and an integral part of the web of changes which was his life. Given the fact of changing circumstances as the very underpinning of life, it seemed simplistic to him to say "it is this" or "it is that" which made the difference. I think what is revealed here is that the therapy is not a discrete thing which happens to the client in the few minutes per week of the professional encounter: It is inseparable from life itself.

Vi's idea of the "readiness for change" lying within the client points to a similar distinction: That is, that therapeutic change is not something that just happens because of the therapy. Her idea of "setting up the environment" for the client's readiness to unfold, is precisely the sense I got from so many of the participants. For Kate, as we saw, it was an environment of total acceptance in which she could begin to face herself. For Joan it was an environment of calm where her words suddenly meant something to someone. For Greg it was an environment of respect for his pace. For Garth it was an environment where he could learn what he needed to learn to regain control over his life. For all of these people the therapy was an environment of love, where the barriers to learning were removed: prejudice, labelling, depersonalization, objectification of the other, deafness to dialogue.

Repeatedly I heard from these people that they always felt like they were the "expert" on their problem, that the therapist never hinted at wanting to take that away from them. In Vi's words:

> "At the same time we're saying to the therapist 'you're the expert', we're also saying 'but not about me!' You may know more about psychology, but at no time can you say 'I know how you feel' because you don't!"

In a similar way I also frequently heard the words "it was my journey", or some variation of that. Greg chose a fascinating metaphor of himself as a "bumper car":

> "It's like when you're going down a road and you've got a bumper car and the sides have got rubber on them. When you get to the corner you get a little bump, and you get steered along till you find where you're going, and that's what happened.....It was my road, but he provided the bumpers. All he had to do was stand there and make the curves, that's all. I found my way.

When I asked him who was driving his car, he answered:

> "I'm still driving my car. It's still my road, except there's a whole land of pavement, and he made a road on it kind of, a couple of curves. When I first went to see him I wanted to go this way, but really I wanted to go that way. He helped me get there, maybe not as fast as I wanted, but I've learned it doesn't matter what speed."

For Frank, although the language is entirely different, a very similar experience is conveyed. The therapist's real, concrete presence (like Grant's "bumpers") called from his centre to Frank's centre, and a "passage to ultimate reality" was created. For Kate, the therapist was like a push which got her out of a rut where she was spinning her wheels. Once she was moving again "he just got out of the way". She described it another way too:

> "They sort of help you, like holding a flashlight, to show you a bit where you're going. You figure it out, and then once you're on the roll, they have to know when to let go, when to get out of the way!"

She went on to describe how the light was "just a little ahead", not far, because the direction wasn't yet clear to either of them. I asked Kate what it was that gave the light, and she answered:

> "By being really insightful. It was like showing me something that I couldn't quite see at the time but it was obvious...I just couldn't see it!"

She then went on in that conversation to talk about all the revelations that came to her as a result of the "flashlight" which the therapist held for them. But she was clear: These were **her** learnings. It was **her** journey through the dark. He accompanied her, but did not "drag her his way".

For Joan, it was as if she was concealed within a lump of clay, and the therapist removed all the garbage so she could be seen. The following passage reveals her experience of how she changed:

> "He guided what I already had. He sort of channelled **my** direction. He helped me find the direction I already had, but didn't know! He was able to strip all the unimportant stuff away, and helped to show what it was that was important to me...He didn't lead me. He didn't steer me....It was **my** journey. He took the garbage out of the way so I could see what was important. I guess I already knew what was important, but it was hard to see the forest for the trees.

Later, she said this:

> "Here I am in this lump of clay, and he helped get rid of the garbage. I feel that some of the things I know now are things I knew when I was in my early teens, but lost along the way. I'm getting back in touch with what Iost.....I took a wrong turn, and needed help to get back on track."

Kate echoes with a similar idea:

> "When I went to see him (the therapist), my resources were hidden under a pile of rubble, along with me....just buried, and I was suffocating, drowning....And I finally found a way to become unburdened from all that."

She went on to describe how she now has confidence in her ability to get herself "unstuck" if her life starts to bog down again, and that that--the confidence that she can do it, that she can trust her own resources--was the major gift of the therapy. For Kate, what was discovered in the process of therapy was not necessarily "what the problem was", that is a **name** for it, or an explanation of it. Instead there was an undeniable process of growth in which she re-discovered that "self" which she already always was!

> "In a sense I'm different, but in a sense I'm not different. In a sense I'm really what I have always been, but I got thrown off the path. Out of synch, out of focus, out of balance. Now how I feel and how I am, is the way I've always really been underneath it all, but now, underneath has come to the surface....Now I feel I'm **more of who I am.**"

Greg described his experience this way:

> "I always wanted it to be that clear, but it never was.(Exactly what the problem was). It's clearer to me now over time, and the problem it's hardly

> even a problem really...it's a thing you have to work out with yourself over time...It's a growing up!"

What was discovered was in a sense simply a path of growth which had somehow been abandoned or lost, not a new "self", or a new psychological jargon within which to understand that self--just a path, or direction, or sense of movement was what they experienced. And that path was a joyous discovery. Finally, Garth in his own unique way, in reference to the skills he learned, said:

> "I feel what I've accomplished, I can continue with this, build on it, stand on it."

The final thread which I see woven through all these experiences is that the path of change was determined by the client, and was fully consistent with their identities as human beings. Repeatedly I heard from these participants how the therapist "had faith" in them, that they could do what they had set out to do. The therapist wasn't interested in trying to "cure" them, but in Vi's words, which have already been quoted, simply offering an environment with no barriers to growth. This is what I have called "the environment of love".

6. Discussion

A. The Differences which make a Difference

There were three outstanding themes in all the dialogues--three distinctions which appeared again and again for me as I brought together this story. The first one had to do with the individuality of the client, with her presence as a unique, whole person rather than as a case, or client, or cluster of problems. The second distinction had to do with the individuality of the therapist, with her presence as a whole, unique person rather than as a distanced clinician, expert, or authority. The third distinction had to do with the meeting between the two persons, with the creation of dialogue and a unique event of understanding, and the creation of a loving environment for change. These are the "differences which made a difference". What happens in psychotherapy which makes a difference to the client? Let me summarize the answers as they are revealed by my eight partners in dialogue.

The client as a whole, unique person

It arose as an amazing commonality among the participants that none of them ever felt "like a client". This distinction between being a client and being a person--which every participant made with great conviction--was a distinction between being reduced to the object of the therapist's analysing gaze and being a true subject or partner or person in an authentic human encounter. This distinction was explored and expressed in various ways in the dialogues. For

Garth, it was the highlight of his experience that he was treated by the therapist not as a clinical case, but as a person with real struggles, whose symptoms were understandable in those terms and even normal. It was this very simple act of bringing him forth as a capable human being which totally reoriented him to his problem, lifted him out of feeling helpless, and put him back in charge of his own life. His "clinical depression" became a non-entity. He was the subject of the therapy.

For all the participants there was that sense that the therapist was really interested in them, that they were worth getting to know as persons with real lives, with families and concerns and goals which extended beyond their problems. Everyone spoke of the joy of talking and being listened to, of realizing that one's words conveyed something of importance, that one's speaking mattered. Being **heard** was more than an act of analytic listening: To be **heard** meant that one's world had been brought forth and received, that one's person had been revealed and understood. Many spoke of being "cared for" by the therapist, but not in a sentimentalized fashion. The therapist "took care" to bring them forth and preserve their identity and integrity as whole persons. For Vi, Kate, Joan, and Janet, this also meant freedom to speak honestly about their problems without feeling judged or trivialized.

All of the participants spoke of the importance of the fact that they had been heard in terms of their uniqueness as persons, that there had been no attempt to reduce them to labels or diagnoses which categorized them in terms of their similarities to other cases. They were unique, and their problems were unique. Further, they were persons who were not defined by their problems, but whose problems were manifestations of their personhood. They did not want their problems to be wrestled away as something distinct from them, something to be removed and destroyed so they could be free of them. Most of these participants expressed some sense that their problem in fact was them, and inseparable from them and their lives. It was this "wholeness" which was respected by the therapists. By bringing them forth as a unity, they were brought forth not just in their pathology but in their full complexity as living, changing, growing persons. They all felt healthy, resourceful, and capable in their therapy, not sick, inadequate, and helpless.

The Therapist as a Person

All of the participants made the distinction that the therapist had been more than a clinician, more than a distanced examiner of their problems. The therapist was a real person in the encounter, not a role. This was absolutely essential to their understanding of how and why they changed. For all of them it meant that the real expert on their problems was themselves, that the therapist was not the authority dispensing the cure, that the problem was not something to be diagnosed and "fixed" by the therapist, that the path of change was going to emerge through their interaction, not by legislation of the therapist. Again and again I heard puzzled and delighted comments about the friendliness and personhood of the therapists, and the equality of the relationship as one of partners in dialogue rather than doctor and patient. I heard repeated comments about the therapist not coming across like a doctor or like an expert, about the unobtrusiveness of the training and technique, the simplicity of the language, the absence of jargon and technical talk, the "common sense" nature of suggestions or advice. This was a person who respected their language and world views, who worked within their specific beliefs, who made suggestions only after careful listening to their own ideas, and who presented every suggestion as a "maybe we could look at it this way..." These therapists were gentle and non-confrontational even when they were making suggestions.

For some, like Frank and Joan and Janet, the therapist was actually willing to reveal some aspects of his or her personal life, to share stories and even some personal struggles. This "realness" of the therapist "with struggles that are visible", as Frank put it, was an important distinction for these participants, one of the major distinctions in fact, and an essential part of their experience of change. These three spoke of a limited mutuality in the encounter, of a feeling that their lives had made a difference, had actually added to the life of the therapist. They were also the ones who spoke of the therapist's constant availability to them, and willingness to be present at times of crisis. These were the ones who mentionned that they had home phone numbers for the therapists. Janet's therapist, as we recall, was willing to be present at the time of her labour and delivery.

Others were not so explicit about how much they knew of the personhood of the therapist, or did not make it so central to their experience. Garth for example, talked about the warmth and genuineness of his therapist, and mentionned that he did know a few things about her family. He also knew that she used the techniques she taught him. He did not underrate the importance of this: He said that he would not have returned if she hadn't been so comfortable a person to talk to, but her personhood did not seem to figure so centrally in his experience as it did for Frank, Joan, and Janet. For Garth it was the skills he learned, and the fact that with them he regained control of his life, which was the major distinction of his experience. What is interesting to me though is that even in this apparently rather teaching-oriented therapy he felt fully respected as a whole person, and felt very much a partner in the process, not just a passive recipient of certain skills. He still felt very much in charge of the direction of the therapy.

Greg was obviously delighted and intrigued by his therapist's personable and friendly manner, and could not understand how he could relate to him in such simple and common sense terms after so much training. This was an important distinction for Greg: It meant that he himself was the expert, that the therapist wasn't going to figure it out for him. Lars too spoke with great enthusiasm about the fact that his therapist had been so personable, so easy to talk to, so friendly. Like Greg, he had been prepared to be treated like a patient, and was wonderfully surprised that he never became a case, and the therapist never acted like the expert. Again, the benefit to him was the feeling that he was in control of his destiny, that he was a partner in the work of change.

In fact, regardless of how centrally the personality of the therapist figured in the sessions, one thing was definitely common to all these participants' experiences: This was a real person, not a doctor or an expert, and this was a person who was willing to risk being present, being active and interactive rather than passive. These therapists enjoyed their clients, treated them with respect and even affection. Finally, they were equals to the clients, not superiors.

The therapist's skills, training, and techniques, were distinguished by all the participants as a difference which made a difference--but there was a tremendous amount of ambivalence about this distinction, and much more unresolved ambiguity than about any other distinction. Frank was the most articulate about his experience in this regard. Clearly for him, the "little techniques" as he called them, were helpful, but they were really nothing more than the "frame"--and in his view, any frame would have been equally fine because it was the person of his therapist within the frame and the ultimate reality which called to him through the frame, which were the real essence of the therapy. For Garth, in contrast, the person of the therapist was more like the frame, and the techniques figured more centrally in the therapy.

For Joan and Vi there was a terrible loathing about the whole idea of the therapist using techniques, but my sense is that this was really an aversion to the thought of being manipulated and treated as an object. There were still those "little techniques" which Frank referred to, still some suggestions and advice, still the occasional offering of opinions. But for these women, the important thing was that none of this was intrusive or imposed upon them. This was true in fact for all the participants: Always, the ideas and techniques of the therapist were found fitting to their situation, and seemed to arise naturally from it. There was never a sense for any of them that the therapist's ideas were "right".

The Meeting

For all of the participants there was an important distinction between therapy and ordinary relationships. All of them felt that this was a relationship "with a difference", and all of them thought that they were helped more by this relationship than they might have been by a friend. Significantly though, it was not the therapist's knowledge or expertise per se which they identified as the distinction which mattered. It was not by the techniques that the therapy was distinguished as different and as helpful, but by the nature of the relationship. This was a relationship defined as specifically **about them**. It was a ritualized context for talking where the subject matter was always exclusively themselves and where the goal was change. So in that sense it was different from other relationships, but not entirely different. The therapist was there as a **friend**, but the ritual context "this is therapy" distinguished it as a relationship with a definite purpose beyond mutual friendship.

The participants in these dialogues also had a sense that in their encounter with the therapist a world of common dialogue and understanding emerged--a world of "betweenness". There was a sense that the problem itself emerged through dialogue, through the finding of words to bring it to expression, and that the work of naming the problem was a cooperative endeavour. They felt very much understood as the therapy progressed. There was no violation of their own world views.

All of the participants described the journey towards change as **their** journey. This was a distinction of major importance to everyone. The therapist's role was one of guide or companion. Various metaphors were used, but the underlying commonality was that the therapist provided a loving medium where their "thou" was called forth to follow its own path of change without interference, to grow in conformity to, as Kate put it, "the me that I always was".

B. Reflections on the Themes

It was unavoidable when I was writing up the "themes", and even now as I summarized them, that they should appear as three distinct themes, one having to do with the client, one with the therapist, and one with the encounter between them. It is unfortunate that that should be necessary, but I could see no other way to bring them to language, except one at a time, even though this creates the impression that they are separate when in fact they are overlapping, interlocked and inseparable. This is the way the participants brought them to language as well, and one of the reasons for their frustration in "putting it all in words": Something of the dynamic unity of the encounter seemed missing for them when they sat back and analysed its component parts. Something too is missed in the writing of this, which I would like now to recapture. There are not really three separate themes, but three variations on the same theme. It is hard to actually name this larger theme: It is the whole picture of therapy from which the three themes have been extracted, and that picture is distinctly unlike the dispensing of a technology of change. What these eight participants picture is a vibrant, transforming dialogue, a collaborative "naming of the world" between two people who are fully present in their differences and fully committed to understanding eachother. These encounters were not pseudo-dialogues where client and therapist met on a level of technical exchange, and where the problem or the client were talked about in an abstracted way as objects to be analysed and categorized. The client was not kept at a distance, as an object of clinical dissection and rhetoric, but brought into full relation as a whole person. These therapeutic encounters were between real people, and what transpired between them was a surprisingly unique creation of their collaboration as equal partners. There was a sense of new-ness, of discovery and surprise which accompanied these encounters, and a sense of excitement about what was to come as they unfolded. There was no dispensing of truth through alienating rhetoric, but a gradual revealing of truth as it came to awakening between them in their dialogue. There was no dispensing of the right way, but a gradual illumination of the client's own way. There was no labelling or diagnosis, but the gift of partnership in the naming of experience. This is the picture of therapy which emerges from these themes when they are heard in concert.

C. The Drawing of New Distinctions

For a long time psychotherapists have performed their craft on the basis of certain distinctions about how and why psychotherapy really works. Many of these distinctions are the unquestionned and dubious gift of a supporting epistemology which has itself been unchallenged. The introduction to this dissertation was my attempt to bring some of these to dialogue, and to show the possibilities suddenly open to us when we operate "with objectivity in parentheses", in awareness of the frame through which our world shines forth. Many of our most cherished distinctions have been validated by occasional reinforcement, and we therefore accept them as true distinctions of the way the world we inhabit as therapists "really is". We each have our own cherished beliefs about what works and why, and we tend to describe our work and others' according to those distinctions which have proved valuable to us. Each of us inhabits a therapeutic reality which is distinctively our own, and we calibrate ourselves, our behaviour, our actions in our encounters with our clients as if this inner reality were actually operative in the world "out there" as an objectively verifiable world which is seen by everyone in exactly the same way. Clearly, the vast differences in how different therapists describe the same therapeutic sequences (see for example, John Lawrence's work, 1987), shows that this is simply not so. To some extent, through dialogue, we may find our distinctions reach greater consensuality, but we are far still from reaching complete consensus. This is of course where we must start--with our own distinctions--but real dialogue between those of differing distinctions is impossible on a battleground where some must win, and others lose. Dialogue has as its goal new and mutual understanding, not legislation of who is right.

Some of our most prized distinctions lead to befuddling consequences for us, as for example when clients change "spontaneously" (ie., they change when they are not supposed to), or when they fail to change altogether (ie., they don't change when they are supposed to change). We have no adequate explanations for these all too frequent consequences, except to call them "spontaneous change", "placebo effects", or "faith healing" on the one hand, and "resistance to change", malingering, or "difficult client" on the other. If as therapists we inhabit a domain where we possess a body of established facts about human behaviour and an established technology of change, then these kinds of consequences appear to us as anomalies, or as failures of our methods.

Drawing new distinctions is not an easy task, and we do not simply abandon our old ones. The whole point of understanding is not to speak an entirely new language which no one else has ever spoken, but to build respectfully upon the traditions within which we have our being. This is a task which can only be achieved through dialogue, by encountering the otherness of distinctions which are not our own, and by allowing ourselves to be transformed. The richest source of dialogue is of course the clients themselves who participate with us in the event of therapy. We all, as therapists, do what I have done in this story, though perhaps not always as deliberately. We all ask "Is what I am doing making a difference?" continuously throughout our sessions, looking for that "fit". In fact, all good therapy is, I think, a paradigmatic hermeneutic event where client and therapist have the task of calibrating their words and behaviours to the other to reach the good fit of mutual understanding.

If therapy is not an encounter for the dispensing of expert knowledge, then what is it? What do we do, and what if anything do the clients distinguish as truly meaningful? In the previous chapter are the clients' stories about what made a difference to them in their therapy, as I have understood them. Now I would like to begin yet another dialogue, this time with those themes as the partner, and my same question "What happens in therapy which makes a difference?" as the subject matter to be illuminated. What do those themes have to say to us as therapists? What are the differences which make a difference?

D. Techniques, Methods, and the Artwork of Change

"Draw a distinction" was the command of G. Spencer-Brown (1973). "Use a technique", or "Be in command of some method", might well be our command as therapists, for clearly, without some method, psychotherapy can become meaningless and directionless chatter. (Even the casual conversations of friends conform to unwritten rules.) The participants in this study were grateful for "little techniques" (as Frank put it), but they never felt "techniqued". They never experienced the encounter as a technical exchange, but as a transforming dialogue within which the techniques faded from direct view, absorbed by the person of the therapist. Like all good art, it is not the technique itself to which the work points: These are not the message, but the frame through which the message is revealed. So too in therapy I think. We cannot escape using some method, just as in making music one must conform to certain artistic conventions or risk making mere noise. However, the method is subserved to a goal other than its own display. Frankl speaks:

> "Within the framework of psychotherapy, the methodology and technique applied at any given time is least effective of all: rather, it is the human relationship between physician and patient which is determining." (Frankl, 1973, p. 24).

To this I would like to add Buber's voice:

> "I have the impression of a certain change in psychotherapeutic practice in which more and more therapists are not so confident that this or that theory is right and have a more 'musical' or floating relationship to their clients.....It is much easier to impose oneself on the patient than it is to use the whole force of one's soul to leave the patient to himself and not to touch him. The real master responds to uniqueness." (Buber, 1966, p. 38)

Indeed, that is how the participants in this story felt. It was not the methods of the therapist which they perceived as healing, but the presence of the real person of the therapist, and the dialogue between them. They were aware of the "music" which happened between them, not the techniques themselves. Whatever technology passed between therapist and client did so so beautifully unnoticed that the clients felt touched by the therapist's person, not by the methods. "He and his profession are one and the same", said Joan. And Frank commented repeatedly on the methods of his therapist as simply the "frame" through which another reality became visible to him. It mattered little to him what frame the therapist used, for the frame had not drawn attention upon itself, but only to the reality beyond. For Kate, the techiques were like a "flashlight" held by the therapist, illuminating the way ahead. In all these lovely metaphors, the technique is like a light: One does not "see" the light itself, but the reality which it illuminates. I think that this is conveyed very clearly by these participants' sense of the genuine caring of their therapists. Again, the real person, and the real caring of the therapist was what shone through the methods. The caring itself was not a technique--a "professional courtesy"--but the very essence of the encounters.

There was also a playfulness and a spontaneity in these interactions, and a sense of intrigue about what was to happen next. There was no "formula" which made the unfolding of the encounter entirely predictable. There was real "art" to this work of therapy.

I would like to suggest that being "eclectic" does not necessarily generate the playful, intriguing relationships described by these participants, or the "musical" relationship Buber had in mind. It is quite possible I think to practice eclectically but not hermeneutically, to try to "fit the methods to the client" in the belief that the right method will be the mechanism of change. In fact, the trend in the psychotherapy literature to find which methods work best with which clients under which circumstances, is precisely that. It is guided by the assumption that the relationship is at the service of the methods, rather than the other way around, that one can specify a pure method which can be practiced uniformly by all therapists. To practice hermeneutically requires more: that we look not for the "right" method but for the "good fit", and that the method disappears from view as we look through and beyond it, as through a frame. Like a well-fitted shoe takes us comfortably where we want to go without drawing attention to itself, so fitting methods remain unfelt. There is no "right" method, only different methods, some of which fit, some of which do not.

Vi drew my attention to this quite explicitly. She felt that her "readiness" for change was as much a determinant of what happened in the therapy as the therapist's "readiness", and this was a reminder to me that of course we must fit ourselves and our methods to where the client really is. In Vi's metaphor, the therapist is like a little water, but the growth comes from within the seed itself. Like a good teacher, the therapist provides the environment, but the student does the learning. It is always the client herself who determines what is needed for growth to occur. "He (the therapist) is confident", wrote Buber, "that this growth needs at each moment only that help which is given in meeting" (Buber, 1965, p. 83). Joan alluded to a similar experience: Her therapist took the pieces of her "puzzle", and rearranged them into "something of substance". Keeney (1983) has nicely described therapy with another startlingly similar metaphor as the providing of meaningful "Rorschachs", from which clients select out those elements which make a difference and which allow them to transform their symptoms, to generate new patterns. Therapy, so this metaphor goes, is like a continuous cycling back and forth of transforms between client and therapist, in a process of mutual calibration and mutual shaping. The client shapes the therapist's next communication just as much as the therapist shapes the client's. The product is a creative, playful, ingenious unfolding of a collaborative work of art--much like a "jam session" for jazz musicians. It is the working of rules into something new which transcends the rules themselves.

This idea of the uniqueness of the encounter and the need for a "tailored fit" between the therapist and client, of adapting theory to each unique situation, is not new: It is the pivotal insight of the whole movement we know as "Strategic Therapy" where the therapist designs "a particular approach for each problem" (Haley, 1973, p. 17). Milton Erickson was a master of this kind of tailored intervention, utilizing the client's own language, learnings and resources to meet him where he was, to work with him rather than against him in the attainment of change. He used the common, ordinary language of everyday speech, and his advice was often peculiarly ordinary, and for that reason, startlingly effective: It was keyed with an uncanny simplicity to the everyday processes of change and growth which so easily evade our awareness. He repeatedly emphasized that theory must fit the client, that it must be made fresh for each unique person.

This kind of emphasis is carried through in the work of the MRI group as well, where the focus is on the construction of interventions which fit the unique circumstances and configuration of a client's problem (Fisch, Weakland & Segal, 1982; Watzlawick, 1978; Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974.) The popularity of the brief therapy movement (eg., Haley, 1976, 1984; Madanes, 1981, 1984.) naturalistic hypnosis (Lankton & Lankton, 1983; Rossi, 1976), and of neurolinguistic programming (Bandler & Grinder, 1979; Grinder & Bandler, 1981; Lankton, 1980) as therapeutic styles also points to what I see as a major trend to recover the uniqueness of each client. Here, as elsewhere however, it is easy to fall into the trap of "making the methods fit", of fitting the client to the methods rather than the other way around. This is an ever-present danger when we step outside the hermeneutic circle.

Keeney's book, **Aesthetics of Change** (1983), suggests the term "cybernetics of cybernetics" for the process of recursively organizing our experience such that we appear as part of the systems we describe. This kind of description preserves the self-referential nature of our knowing and highlights our participation in constructing the therapeutic reality. The more we operate in awareness of this the more we recognize that our descriptions say as much about us as observers/therapists, as they do about the client. Further, since we are in part responsible for the creation of the therapeutic reality, our words arise not from an objective reality behind which we can hide or from which we can distance ourselves, but in and through our own actions, for which we are responsible.

One of the most provocative controversies in the psychotherapy literature has to do with whether there are specific mechanisms of change attached to specific methods, or whether all therapies operate through more or less common "non-specific" effects. There is something about this argument which strikes me as ill-framed, and it is the juxtaposition of these elements as opposing polarities which sets it as an argument to be decided one way or another. Severing the therapeutic reality in this way produces, I think, a pseudo-argument and much confusion. There is no psychotherapy apart from the methods and the people who constitute the encounter. It is not a question of one or the other, but the playing of one through the other. The whole notion of "placebo effect" is another thorny issue in the literature, but it is only upon the assumption that specific methods should produce specific results that such effects should appear to us to be anomalous. If we accept that all change is structure-determined, then all the effects which we so disparagingly call "placebo" are paradigmatic of all change for they arise from the autonomy and self-regulation of the human organism, not unilaterally through the specific effects of what is done to it. These participants had "faith" that the therapy would help them. This was not a blind faith in methods: They did not want to be "done to". They found faith in themselves.

E. Therapy as Dialogue-Centred

Is psychotherapy different from ordinary friendship? What is the difference which we have to offer as psychotherapists? Are we "just" paid friends, doing what friends and relatives do naturally for one another?

Again, to frame this distinction as a dichotomy of opposites invites misunderstanding. All of the participants in this story spoke of the therapeutic relationship as one of profound friendship and mutual affection, and they were very animated in defending the importance of this distinction. There was however, a difference--not a difference which in any way adulterated the friendship, but an added "something" which they all experienced as distinctly healing. They felt deeply cared for, and indeed, loved by the therapist, and in some cases sensed a special connection which, under other circumstances, would have been the foundation of a lasting, more fully mutual relationship. As we saw, for some of the participants there was a sense that the therapy had been to their mutual benefit, that they had indeed added something to the therapist's life. This speaks clearly I think of the personal presence of these therapists, and of their willingness to be transformed by the words of their clients. But the therapeutic relationship had as its subject matter the client herself and her problem, and as its goal her growth, healing, or learning. It was not a relationship about the therapist, and in that sense it was not fully mutual.

In the Buber-Rogers dialogue of 1957 (see The Knowledge of Man, 1965) both Buber and Rogers emphasized the importance of the therapist and the client being present as "persons" rather than objects. Rogers speaks:

> "I feel that when I'm being an effective therapist I enter the relationship as a subjective person, not as a scrutinizer, not as a scientist. I feel too, that when I am most effective, then somehow I am relatively whole in that relationship, or the word that has meaning to me is "transparent".... There is nothing hidden."

Later in the dialogue he added:

> "Then, if in addition to those things on my part, my client, or the person with whom I'm working is able to sense something of those attitudes in me, then it seems to me that there

> is a real, experiential meeting of persons, in which each of us is changed." (p. 170)

Indeed, the participants in this story identified this as a difference which had really mattered to them: Their therapists were real, and they were equals. In the dialogue cited from above, Buber went on to object to Rogers' idea of mutuality, suggesting that the context "this is therapy" defines the relationship as one of help, where the focus is on the problem of the client, not on the therapist, and where the equality is therefore limited. It is an interesting objection, which the participants in this story have also alluded to. The context "This is therapy" was an important part of establishing the "ritual", of steering the dialogue and defining the work to be done. These therapists were "transparent" in the sense that they brought their whole being to the work, and did not hide behind the role of authority, but there still was not the full mutuality of ordinary friendship. For Vi, remember, this was an essential distinction: That the sharing did not have to be fully reciprocal.

There is a important distinction here which I think can easily be lost or misunderstood. The absence of full mutuality was not experienced by these participants as an **absence** at all--as something "missing" from the relationship--but as a gift of this special kind of relationship. The therapist was fully present in the relationship: This they were equally adamant about. Many of them knew small things about the therapist, his or her interests, life experiences, and so on--enough to make the person of the therapist very real. Further, these therapists also risked that personhood in the sessions--risked making "mistakes" even. But always what guided their dialogue was the very unique subject matter of these meetings: The client and her problem.

In ordinary conversation between friends the subject matter is often (though of course not always) some issue or matter which concerns them both, to which they both look out as it were beyond themselves, and through which they are gathered up together in their concern. In psychotherapy, the concern which brings the partners together is the client, and this is a subject matter which draws the focus not "out" upon the world, but "sideways" so to speak, toward the other. In ordinary conversation an exclusive focus upon one partner runs the risk of seeming narcissistic, and of excluding the concerns of the other, upon which the mutuality of the relationship so depends. That world of the "between" which so characterizes friendship can be temporarily swallowed up in the shift, and dialogue can turn to monologue. In extraordinary friendships of course there would be some alternating rythmn to this, but I think there is still for many people the fear that making themselves the subject matter of dialogue is a possible violation of the friendship code.

I think this is what the participants in this story were pointing to when they spoke of the need for an "objective" partner.

They were not suggesting that they wanted an "authority". As Vi said, "I am the authority on me". These people wanted a different universe of understanding, which they hoped the therapist's "knowledge of psychology" might provide them, but they wanted to select for themselves what was meaningful and what was not. As Kate said, it was essential to find her own way, not to be "dragged his way". Neither were they suggesting however that they wanted a neutral or uninterested partner, or someone who would allow them to engage in empty monologue about themselves. That too they were quite clear about: They wanted interaction, authentic dialogue, not just a "sounding board". They wanted someone who was willing, and able, to turn towards them in their concern--someone who could get caught up with them in a dialogue about themselves. And, they needed a ritual context ("This is 'therapy'") which would make that permissable.

There is another very subtle distinction here which needs to be drawn carefully. Once the subject matter becomes the client, there are two ways in which dialogue can die: if the therapist becomes the authority on the subject matter (and the client dissappears from the dialogue), or the client is allowed to carry on a monologue with the therapist as the audience rather than co-actor. It is vital to the life of their work together that the subject matter to be illuminated draw them both into the creation of the "between". If, in our respect for the client, we allow the dialogue to become exclusively "client-centred", real dialogue ceases--just as, if in our own hubris we allow our own voice to dominate, dialogue ceases. We need to remind ourselves that focussing upon the client as the subject matter to be illuminated requires more from us than listening passively to the client's voice. "Dialogue-centred" is perhaps a more meaningful name than "client-centred" for this work in the domain of the "between".

These clients experienced more than unconditional acceptance by the therapist. They also expressed a certain sense that the therapist, though aligned **with** them in their quest for change, was also a presence up **against** them: That is, that their words and acts met with a real, living person who was standing his ground, not just passively absorbing theirs. These therapists, in standing their ground, accepted them on their own ground. The sense which emerges in these participants' distinctions is not so much of an "empathic understanding" where the therapist makes some aesthetic leap of imagination away from his own ground of experience, or of identification where the therapist connects only with those aspects of the clients' experience which are like his own, but of a bolder reaching out towards the client to meet her and to truly hear and receive her words, while at the same time staying firmly within his own ground. These therapists were anything but passive mirrors, reflecting only the client's own experience. What was reflected between therapist and client was the full concreteness of the therapist, so that what emerged in their interaction was a true sense of its bipolarity. Buber's philosophical anthropology addresses this very issue. If we become human in our interactions with others, if our very existence is brought forth in the interhuman, ontologically, not metaphorically, then we find ourselves, discover who we are as persons, by reaching out to meet the other. It is this act of reaching towards the other, without losing one's own separateness and autonomy, which builds that realm of the interhuman (Buber, 1965; Friedman, 1985) and which makes us more fully human. One can, according to Buber, become more and more of an individual, without becoming more "human". One becomes more human only in that dialogic, bipolar relation where one risks really living with others in their differences.

To some extent this is captured by Rogers' understanding of empathy and positive regard (1951, 1961), which is very much like Buber's notion of "inclusion", except that Buber insists much more emphatically on the ontological necessity of the therapist standing in his own ground, of not laying aside his own view. Certainly, these eight participants' experience suggests that the therapist was a concrete, personal "other", not just a empty facade to absorb their every utterance. Further, the kind of acceptance which they experienced was a confirmation not just of who they were, but of their potential as persons capable of change and growth. There was a sense for them that the therapist was on the side of their own "actualizing forces", and that there was a call to them to become more of what they could become--more, as Joan put it, of who they had always been. Further, there was, especially for Vi, a sense that this domain of the "interhuman" was an ontological reality arising between her and the therapist--a "third" domain which was neither one nor the other of them, but a domain of "we-ness", much like in marriage.

E. Understanding "Persons"

To be met as real "persons" was wonderfully liberating for the clients who participated in these dialogues. To feel distinctly unlike a "client", a number, a case, a problem--to be understood as a person instead of a category or label preconceived by the therapist--was a gift which in itself was experienced as healing.

Wheelis, in a lovely little book, **How People Change**, writes:

> "An anguished woman enters our office, sits down, weeps, begins to talk, and we listen. We are supposed to know what's up here, what the problem **really** is, and what to do about it. But the theories with which we have mapped the soul don't help, the life she relates is unlike any other. We may cling to our map, telling ourselves we know where we are and all is well, but if we look up into the jungle of her misery we know we are lost." (p. 18)

Friedman echoes:

> "Although no doctor can do without a typology, he knows that at a certain moment the unique person of the patient stands before the unique person of the doctor. He throws away as much of his typology as he can and accepts the unforseeable happening that goes on between therapist and patient. Although one is not allowed to renounce either typology or method, one must know at what moments one should put them aside." (1965, p. 37)

To be led by the client is a grace, an art, an intuition, a willingness to be surprized by the unforseeable in the unfolding of the dialogue. The therapist must bring her "touchstones of reality"; With them she enters dialogue, not to imprison the client in them, but to offer them as a bridge to her own world. This is not unlike Gadamer's insistence that all understanding has as its precondition one's preunderstandings, which are the bridge, not the impediment, to dialogue. The participants in this story alluded to this as well: Even when they disagreed with the therapist on the meaning of an event, even when the therapist's world view was revealed as distinctly different from their own, dialogue did not break down, but was if anything strengthened. How was this possible? I think it was because the context of the relationship had already been worked out as one of mutual appreciation of difference. In this context, the therapists' suggestions or ideas "bridged the gap" as Joan put it. They were not "right", but simply bridges to mutual understanding.

Being a person as a client in psychotherapy means not being reduced to categories and labels. Jung wrote: "All over the world today, it is being recognized that what is being treated is not a symptom, but a patient" (Jung, 1958, p. 12). Friedman talks about the "dialogue of touchstones" in this regard:

> "...if he is a good therapist, he must discover the right movement back and forth between his patient as the unique person he is and the categories and cases that come to his, the therapist's mind. He cannot know by scientific method when a particular example from case histories, his earlier clients, or even his own experience, applies....That is what some people mean when they describe psychotherapy as an art, or what I would call the grace of allowing oneself to be led." (Friedman, 1985, p. 202)

In genuine dialogue partners turn towards one another, and their words intend the other as the real, unique, concrete "other" who stands opposite in all her difference. Words are not empty rhetoric to some imagined audience, nor are they monologue recited in the presence of the other: Their meaning is not to be found either "in one of the two partners nor in both together, but only in their dialogue itself, in this 'between' which they live together" (Buber, 1965, p. 75). In genuine dialogue there is a partnership where each is confirmed as the distinct other that (s)he is, even when that confirmation does not entail approval or agreement. This is the partnership "in naming the world" which Freire insists is the essence of all transforming dialogue--of all liberation. "If instead I take on the role of the objective observer", writes Friedman (1985, p. 207), "and fail to respond from the ground of my own uniqueness, then I have not heard you, much less learned anything myself". We remain imprisoned within our own "closed circuits in which we make a little voyage toward the other and then come back". The other with whom we speak is not engaged as a full person or full partner, but only as a sounding board. It is only when the personhood of the other is fully received that true dialogue becomes possible.

If we anchor the practice of psychotherapy in the positivistic, scientific tradition which seeks understanding through objectification, the domain of the interhuman loses its ontological reality as the base of our being, the base of all knowledge and understanding. Our clients and their problems become objects to be analyzed and labelled. We lose a vocabulary for talking about what happens between client and therapist in their dialogue, for describing that sense of "we-ness" which Vi alluded to. We have instead an understanding of language as the use of words to depict static truths, and of dialogue as the transmission of the truth rather than the mutual participation in its creation. The interhuman, which in its essence utterly depends on the partnership of persons in naming the world, has no existence.

If we anchor psychotherapy in the domain of the interhuman--in the hermeneutic circle which bridges between us-- we can recapture I think that sense of client and therapist being present as the whole, unique persons which they are, engaged in the task of bringing forth a relationship in the "I-Thou". Of course no relationship exists exclusively in the "I-Thou": It oscillates between setting apart and bringing into relation. But the goal of understanding is always to cycle back into relation, to rise out of the deriving, analytic gaze which keeps the other as an object of scrutiny rather than a true subject in her own right, and into full mutuality. The analytic, reductive gaze reduces the client to

> "...some schematically surveyable and recurrent structures. And this look is a deriving one because it supposes it can grasp what a man has become, or even is becoming, in genetic formulae, and it thinks that even the dynamic central principle of the individual in this becoming can be represented by a general concept. An effort is being made today to radically destroy the mystery between man and man."

(Buber, 1965, p. 81)

This is an ever-present danger for us as therapists, that in seeking to understand we may forget the person and get lost in our own objectifications. The participants in this story did not feel that they had been labelled. Repeatedly, as we saw, they spoke of the importance of not being judged, or categorized, or reduced to descriptive labels of any sort. Vi suggested a fascinating juxtaposition when she spoke of the importance of the therapist keeping a sense of "how varied the similarities are"! That is, while we may think in terms of labels which highlight the similarities between clients, we must also keep hold of the unique and unrepeatable expression of those similarities--just as, for example, we all have a basically similar human anatomy, while each of us is surprisingly and awesomely unique.

In medicine there is an increasing call to conceptualize illness in terms of the whole configuration of the person's life, as manifestations of a life which calls to be set right (eg., Tournier's "medicine of the whole person" (1973), and Siegel's (1986) experiences with "exceptional patients"). Wheelis (1973) speaks of the "psychological" conflicts which people experience as manifestations of what one is, how one lives, feels, reacts. A problem is not an ailment which afflicts the client and needs to be fixed: It is the client himself, his mode of being in the world, his solution to existence. And the goal of therapy is not to fix the problem, but for the client to change the way he is in the world. It is interesting to me that many of the participants in this story reported something much like this--that is, that they were grateful that their "problem" had not been wrenched away as an entity separate from **who they were**, an alien and destructive entity to be fought and "fixed". They felt "whole" in the presence of the therapist, and their problems became less mysterious and alienating when they accepted them as part of themselves.

If instead of conceptualizing the "unconscious" in the usual psychologized version as that aspect of our being from which we are divided by conscious awareness, the unconscious is reconceptualized as that unity of being of the person in her wholeness **before** separation into mind and body, physical and psychical, then symptoms speak not of conflicts "in the psyche" but of conflicts in the very roots of the person's being, and psychotherapy is the work of setting one's whole person, or one's whole relation to the world, straight. With our usual psychological typologies we tend to obscure the importance of the interhuman, and to psychologize it, losing in the process that sense that as physical beings in the world, we bear within us, even within our physical bodies, the history of our interactions in the world and with others, both in their glory and in their tragedy. **We are** that history. It is not a piece of learning which can be unlearned or reprogrammed. We are not simply a psyche upon which life is inscribed, or machines which can be repaired. We are embodied beings who bear our entire history within every act, every word. Therapy is not the undoing, or unlearning of this history. There is no method which provides solutions to a lifetime of misery or tragedy, which replaces the love of one's companions. Even here, again, we confront the fundamentally hermeneutical nature of all living. We do not abandon the past or become a new "self": Perhaps what we accomplish in therapy is more limited. We co-drift with our clients on their path of change, and between us find that strange faith which is sometimes born between people in dialogue, that we can indeed live with what life offers, and even grow through it. Many of the participants alluded to this quite eloquently in the metaphors they used to describe their process of growth. Through their symptoms they rediscovered, as Joan put it, "the me that I always was".

To be brought forth as a real, whole person in psychotherapy was such an amazingly simple gift, but one of the utmost importance for these participants. For the therapist to be present in his wholeness, with his theories and his techniques which were him, was a gift of equal importance. For these participants, the therapist lived his knowledge in every act and word; He did not impose it or dispense it. There was friendship and mutual respect, and a common quest for the client's well-being.

G. The Politics of Dialogue

Bateson speaks:

> "As therapists, clearly we have a duty. First, to achieve clarity in ourselves; and then to look for every sign of clarity in others and to implement them and reinforce them in whatever way is sane in them." (1972, p. 47)

The goal of therapy is none other than to bring forth that clarity in whatever way is compatible with the unique design of each person, whatever way is sane "in them", not in accordance with my own agenda. Bateson speaks further:

> "...the idea that I can teach you, unilaterally, is derivative from the premise that the mind controls the body. And whenever a psychotherapist lapses into unilateral therapy he is obeying the same premise....The same thinking leads, of course, to theories of control and to theories of power." (1972, p. 485-486)

As therapists, clearly we do have a duty, and it is, as Bateson suggests, to be absolutely clear about what it is we are doing, what we hope to achieve, and why. Further, we have a duty to explicate amongst ourselves the implications borne by our often hidden epistemological and ontological assumptions, how they influence what we think is possible and even desirable in therapy, and how they determine the methods we use to get there. To the extent that our cherished beliefs become hardened by occasional reinforcement, they become traps rather than windows. This would be alright if it were not for the fact that the client is the beneficiary of our unclarity. It is not only we as therapists who shipwreck ourselves with the unfittingness of our theories: We take our clients with us. To be labelled is the antithesis of dialogue. Its result is the objectification and dehumanization of the client. There is a dogmatism and a hubris which accompanies labels, and which stifles the right of persons to "name" their own reality.

These participants were treated lovingly by their therapists, with faith, and trust. Their right to participate in the construction of their problem, to bring it to language, was respected. In fact, many of them described talking to the therapist as a bringing of the problem into focus, into the light--as if, in hearing the story through their words the problem had come to stand for the first time. Kate talked about needing to hear herself actually speak, needing to say the words to someone. Joan talked about having to find out "what was inside", Vi about "stumbling upon" discoveries as she spoke. Truly, for these people, speaking was more than rhetoric: It was the creation of the problem as it came to light in language.

The path of change was their path, discovered as it revealed itself in the light of the therapeutic encounter. This too is what we might expect. These participants were not changed by the therapist's methods, or by the therapist's knowledge or battery of techniques. They changed in conformity with their own design, and at their own pace. The therapy was not something which happened to them, but an event which they chose for themselves, which became part of their journey towards change. None of the participants credited the therapist with their recovery or change, though all were deeply grateful for the encounter.

A psychotherapy rooted in the interhuman becomes a psychotherapy of liberation rather than propagandization. Buber (in The Knowledge of Man, 1965) talks about propoganda as a form of sublimated violence which allows the illusion of autonomy while winning power through depersonalization. The propagandist is interested not in the real person who he is trying to influence, but only in those individual qualities which can be exploited to win him over. He does not really believe in his own cause or in its power to win people by its truth, but he does believe in his own special methods. He is confident that with the right methods he can win people to the cause. The educator, in contrast, believes that the truth resides within all persons as a potential to be actualized in accordance with the unique way of each; that he cannot impose himself, but can only align himself with the actualizing forces which in every person will establish the truth in a unique and unrepeatable way. "He is confident that this growth needs at each moment only that help which is given in meeting." (p. 83) Freire (1986) also talks about the domesticating and dehumanizing effects of all propaganda--and I think psychotherapy, as a technology, can be very much like "propaganda". Whenever human relationships revolve around relations of power, where one person has the authority to tell the other the truth, where sloganeering, technical jargon, and rhetoric replace dialogue, our ontological vocation to transform ourselves is oppressed. I become a "being for others", rather than a being for myself. I am the beneficiary of words which have no meaning for me: I hear them, but they cannot transform me. Even if I submit to them I am not liberated, only domesticated: My autonomy is obliterated in the face of the other who absorbs me. In contrast, wherever there is faith and commitment to the other and a bond of mutual trust, we move into that "ever closer partnership in the naming of the world" which is the essence of dialogue. In dialogic relation persons claim together the right to "say their own word", to "name the world". The truth is unveiled and comes to stand between them.

This idea of the world coming to being through language, of men creating and recreating their world through dialogue, of objects coming to stand through our acts of distinction, is an idea which winds its way through the work of so many writers. For Heidegger and Gadamer, the problem of language came to centre stage not as a system of signals, but as the clearing where beings were disclosed (and hidden), where the world became manifest. For Maturana we exist in a social domain where through our recursive operations in language we generate a consensual domain, or "world". It is in language that distinctions are made, and objects are called forth. It is in language that a person becomes a being for herself, and defines herself.

The work of psychotherapy is a work of dialogue. It is a bringing forth of a reality in the interhuman. It is a hermeneutic reflection in the circle of language which its partners generate in their coming together to name the world. It is a work of cooperation and loving acceptance of each other's "otherness", where differences are affirmed and strengthened as the very essence of dialogue, where a reality is created not through competition for the truth but through collaboration and mutual understanding. This is the kind of picture which these eight participants revealed. Perhaps then, all psychotherapy is a "healing through dialogue" (Friedman, 1985; Stanton, 1978), and it is upon this ground that therapy either succeeds or fails: succeeding when the meeting allows real dialogue, and failing when it does not.

The practise of psychotherapy is political through and through. I think it is inescapably so. We are always already beings in horizons of influence which are themselves never entirely available to our consciousness or to our control. They are the unseen backdrop without which our common life has no meaning at all. It is however our duty to act responsibly with others, especially with our clients who are entrusted to us. The burden is ours to create our distinctions in dialogue with others, lovingly, cooperatively, and without violence to the realities of others. The burden is also on us to create distinctions which do not further mystify our humanity.

The way we bring people's problems to language in therapy is a political event, regardless of whether we apply a DSM-III diagnosis, label a child "learning-disabled", or distinguish a "systemic" interaction problem. Who in this society has the right, and by what authority they have achieved the right, to diagnose mental problems and to determine their treatment, has been the subject of a heated debate which Szasz (1979) and Laing (1967), among others, have brought to public attention. There is a well-acknowledged body of evidence (eg., Rosenhan, 1975; Scheff, 1975) that labelling is indeed a powerfully restrictive process which can irrepairably damage people's lives. We all learned that the labels teachers apply to their students influence their grades and IQ ratings (Rosenthal, 1971), and that experimenters influence the results of their experiments (Heisenberg, 1958; Orne, 1971). The damage is by no means restricted to the psychiatric settings which were the focus of Szasz's fury. The fact is that all taxonomies are systems for labelling people, and all of them can be used to dehumanize and oppress if we operate without "objectivity in parentheses".

We cannot not theorize, but as therapists, we must settle amongst ourselves that whatever theoretical positions we take, none is more right than the other. We are free to construct whatever fits. We are not bound to any predetermined course of action, or to any theoretical position as "right". In therapy we are engaging with the client in a unique, unrepeatable coupling through which, in dialogue, we move ever closer to what Freire called the partnership in naming the world, what Buber called the life of dialogue in "I-Thou", what Von Foerster has called "eigen-states", and what Maturana has called "co-drift" in a mutual linguistic domain. It is through this collaboration in dialogue that we create a therapeutic reality, that we bring the client's suffering into language--sometimes for the first time. We are free to tailor our theories to the unique choreography of each unique encounter, to continuously amend, and recreate something more useful. Theory, cut off from practice; is empty rhetoric, technical jargon. It does not speak--one does not see anything through it--until it brings forth a common world, and with it, dialogue, and understanding.

A therapist who relentlessly pursues a client with a failing intervention, or a refused interpretation, is a therapist who is committed to the rightness of his theory rather than its fit. Badgering of a client with a jargon which is unfamiliar or unintelligible, or other attempts to convert the client to the therapist's language and point of view, betrays a therapist who is committed to the view that there are right and wrong ways of knowing, that his scientific language is superior to the language of the client, and that he has the right to name the world for the client. All of this is unnecessary violence.

There is no such thing "out there" in the client as an ego, or a drive, or a defense, or an irrational belief. There are no hierarchies or boundaries or enmeshments "out there". These words exist in the domain of our theories. Families are not held together by relations of power: Our theory is. When we talk about an ego, or a hierarchy, or whatever, we are talking about what we mean by those terms, not some ontological thing which is an ego, for instance. We are of course free to make such distinctions, and they can be helpful, but the complex choreography which is the domain of human interaction, can support many fitting interpretations, or maps. None of these distinctions is inherently better than the others. Thus, while it has become fashjonable to look for the systemic patterns around symptomatic behaviour, these "systems" are no more "real" than the unfashionable individual focus of other therapists. The whole point, if we operate hermeneutically, is that we can generate whatever distinctions allow us to "see" something--but what we see is what we look for, and we can look for other things.

If clients, like all living systems, are structure-determined, we cannot "instruct" them in how to change nor can we determine the path of change. What we can do may seem limited: We can co-drift with them on their path of change.

7. Conclusion

Concluding this story is not easy. In a sense there is no final conclusion, only the story itself--the story of my own search for understanding, and the journey I took. It is the unravelling and revealing and reweaving of many stories, along with my reflection upon those stories and my own ways of drawing connections through them. It is an invitation to dialogue to you, the reader. Here I have tried to set out my "touchstones" as a bridge to that dialogue. There are of course, other stories, and other connections to be drawn, and some readers may wonder at my deafness to those, my failure to hear what was being spoken in certain passages of dialogue presented here. Those will make another good story I think, but I cannot reflect on what I have not heard. That task will fall to someone else who has heard, or to me at another time.

All of the therapists who are described in this story operated somewhat differently, through different theoretical frameworks, using different techniques and methods. They calibrated themselves within different unique realities. They had received different training. They were not faceless, neutral clinicians delivering identical therapies, but unique, real people, as different from one another as the clients themselves were, working through this difference, through word and method--by training and by intuition-- as artists, waiting to be led by the magic of each unique encounter, waiting to see what could be spoken, what world could be brought to stand. They cared for and respected the client's voice, making a space for it to be heard without judgment or oppression. Still, they did more than this--more than listen and care. They were a living presence over and against the client--not a mirror, but a concrete "other"--speaking through a separate voice and calling for dialogue. For each of the clients a path arose in their meeting--a path of change so fully consistent with who they were, with their own needs and realities, that it stood out clearly as their own path, perhaps long ago abandoned, now rediscovered in the light of this remarkable meeting. Alongside them on that path was the therapist, neither leading nor following, but helping to illuminate the path ahead. While the clients were deeply grateful, they could not say that it was the therapist's doing. It was their own journey, but they needed someone to help them get onto the path, someone to hold the "flashlight", someone to call out to them, someone to hold the frame through which the path became visible again. Somehow through the meeting with the therapist--and even through the therapist's "mistakes" and misundertandings--they benefitted, and they found their way. It was not **because of** the therapist, or because of the techniques that they changed: They were not even aware of being "techniqued", and when techniques were in fact suggested, they felt quite free to select what they wished, and to ignore the rest. But it was not irrelevant either that the therapist had brought some training, or expertise, or "magic" to the encounter. These were like brushes and paint are to an artist--tools to create a world which has never before existed. I think it is a fair conclusion that caring alone was not enough (ie., "necessary and sufficient" for change). An amorphous flood of feeling does not create great art: Art "speaks" when it is situated within traditions which give it meaning. It becomes meaningless when it stands outside and speaks a private language inaccessible to the community. So too as therapists, we are situated within social and political contexts which give us a language and tools for creating our own work. It is essential that we care for our clients, but we must also act. Our caring is manifest in and through our actions.

If I could sum it all up briefly I would have to say that what these therapists shared was a commitment to practicing hermeneutically and in loving collaboration with these clients to bring forth a vital, bipolar relation of persons in the "I-Thou". They achieved a consensual understanding in the therapy--a "we-ness"--which became like the third partner, or third reality in the meeting. Good psychotherapy, like all living, is hermeneutical, and brings us face to face with the otherness of the world which calls us into community. It is in confrontation with the "other" who stands her ground that we encounter some unforeseen path and are transformed; in confrontation with the world in all its mystery that we hear another voice calling us to dialogue. If we practice hermeneutically we bring our full self, our preunderstandings and assumptions and biases--all of it--to the task of understanding the other, for these are the frame through which we see, and without which there is no view at all. But we come prepared to alter the view, to look through other frames, to see through our theories and methods as through windows, rather than into them, as into traps. Therein too lies our flexibility: That in seeing differently, we are enabled to act differently, and that in acting differently, we then see the world afresh. This circle between practice and theory, between acting and knowing, is the hermeneutic circle, bringing us forever back to our own selves as both knower and known, back into the circle of observations which includes our own acts of observing among the observations to be understood. This is the essence of hermeneutic practice: To continuously fuse action to theory, to connect what we see with what we do in playful, creative loops which combine rigour and imagination, technique and spontaneity. Therein lies the bridge between the technology and the art of therapy. Our techniques do not make people change; but they do constitute the language of therapy, without which there is no communication, only random, monologic nonsense. So what, as therapists, do we do? What happens in psychotherapy which really makes a difference? I close with another story:

> "Now at the Sheep-Pool in Jerusalem there is a place with five colonnades. Its name in the language of the Jews is Bethesda. In these

> colonnades there lay a crowd of sick people, blind, lame, and paralysed, waiting for the disturbance of the water; for from time to time an angel came down into the pool and stirred up the water. The first to plunge in after this disturbance recovered from whatever disease had afflicted him. Among them was a man who had been crippled for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and was aware that he had been ill a long time, he asked him, 'Do you want to recover?' 'Sir', he replied, 'I have no one to put me in the pool when the water is disturbed.'" (John 5: 2-7)

Perhaps, afterall, we simply put them in the pool.

8. Postscript

Psychotherapy is a paradigmatic hermeneutic event in which client and therapist, through the unfolding of their dialogue in their pursuit of mutual understanding, collaborate in the construction and knowledge of their common world. This dialogic event is only possible where there is mutual care and respect for the other-ness of the partner's voice. Here, the artwork of therapy flourishes, for the other speaks as a unique, creative text awaiting dialogue and understanding. Many of the participants in this study called the experience of being interviewed by me "therapeutic". For them, as for me, there was a wonderful sense of discovery in our dialogue, as their experience was brought into words between us. The sense of being understood is liberating: This is the gift of dialogue, the essence of the interhuman, not that we transcend ourselves or gain certain knowledge of the truth, but that we become "more of who we are" on that "narrow ridge" where I and Thou meet. The gift of language is that through it we create and recreate our world, through it we are liberated from static self-certainty and zero-learning into the life of dialogue which simultaneously expresses our humanity and makes us more fully human.

For me it was the silence at the close of our dialogues which was the most peculiarly satisfying. Those pockets of rest amidst the words conveyed the mutuality of the understanding we had achieved, and the beauty of the "I-Thou". There was a sense that in talking--often playfully and metaphorically--about their experiences, we arrived at a meta-level understanding of their experience of therapy, and that this process, which culminated in silence between us was quite similar to the process of discovery or shifting of frames which so characterized their experience of change in therapy. The lovely metaphors which each of the participants generated near the close of our dialogues arose quite spontaneously (recall the "bumper cars", the clay, the flashlight), and like the silences, they spoke of a shift where words suddenly came together in pictures, and understanding was transformed. This wordless silence--the coming to the end of speaking--which happened in these dialogues as we reached consensual understanding, intrigues me as a phenomenon in itself. There is something about a work of art--a painting for instance--which speaks so immediately as a "Thou", which conveys its message immediately through itself (It is its message). We ourselves, as human beings, are not so immediately transparent to one another perhaps, and we are both revealed and hidden through our words through which we struggle to achieve understanding. That silence, which arrives near the end, which is the culmination of our speaking, is the mark of real dialogue I think, for it confirms that there has been a struggle to really hear the otherness of the other, to allow the "Thou" to come to stand. Is this anything like the silent understanding which so naturally arises between person and animal, between person and nature, where words do not exist, but an "I-Thou" relationship has come to stand?

This whole exploration was a gift to me as well, a process of creation full of surprise and intrigue. Perhaps the most fascinating discovery for me was the confirmation of something which I have long known, or at least suspected, but could never quite articulate until now: It is that writing, like all communication, if it really creates something, creates something new, and in some sense, unanticipated even by oneself. I did not know, until the actual writing of this, what it is that could be said. Now I know. I discovered by writing, just as the participants in this story discovered something in the words which arose between us, just as our clients discover a problem by bringing it to language in therapy. Words have a creative magic of their own which they play out through us, if only we listen. Language is a medium which is continuously self-renewing and self-expanding; It has an inner plasticity which is given to us to play further. Underlying every word is a universe of unspoken possibility which speaking capitalizes on and illuminates, first this meaning, then that, drawing forth hidden shades of meaning. This is the beautiful, creative side of language. There is also the darker, oppressive side of language: The power which conceals and oppresses here, while it illuminates there, is ever-present. We are all like Heisenberg's observer: We cannot know everything, and having knowledge of one thing precludes knowldge of other things. We look through only one window at a time, and each view is slightly different. So too with all our theories, which are language-bound. Every word is a window which allows one view.

I am very grateful to the men and women who joined with me to create this work. They have illuminated a way for me which I had not seen before, and I think I may be a better therapist for it. There were thrilling moments in the dialogues when I saw so clearly how like good therapy our conversations were: There were moments of mutual resonance which really transformed me. This indeed is a gift I am grateful to be able to take with me now in all my work. In writing this dissertation I have risked my own distinctions and I have revealed something of who I am as a person and as a therapist. This has not been easy. There is no place to hide: No data to which I can retreat and claim "These are the facts...I rest my case". My story reveals my own universe of distinctions which are forever changing, elusive, and slippery to description. Even now, as I finish this, I wish I could go on, amend some of what I have said, turn a particular phrase under some different light. The process never reaches its completion, and this ending is but another beginning, a place for renewed questionning and curiosity, a waiting room for yet more surprises.

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